

African American Alumni Oral History Project – Phase Two: *Legacy of Cardinals of Color*

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

The African American experience has always been a controversial topic throughout American history. African Americans have fought for centuries for equal rights in employment, education, recreation, and other everyday activities. The most important aspect, though, is in education. Many African Americans pride education as being the basis through which future generations will succeed and overcome oppression. By looking at it in a local aspect through the lens of the Ball State African American experience, a more in-depth look can be obtained to identify the struggles and the victories achieved by African American alumni. I was guided through this project by reading *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* (2001) and *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community* (2004), along with practical research from *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (2014) and a visit to the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C. With this guidance, I was able to conduct and transcribe two different two-hour interviews with Cardinals of Color to gain their perspective on their Ball State experience and what challenges and lessons helped them grow and succeed.

Acknowledgements

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DVDs included in back of binder

Process Analysis Statement

Being able to capture a part of history such as the African American experience of Ball State alumni was an eye-opening opportunity. This project was something I never saw myself doing while at Ball State, but it has transformed my perspective on Ball State and the value of my education. Putting together such an intricate project was something I have never done before. It was truly a team effort to make everything possible, but it also took a tremendous amount of individual research and investigation. We were capturing stories of Cardinals of Color that are established in their careers and well known in their professions. Some jumped at the chance to come back to Ball State and share their individual experiences here and how it has helped them succeed in their time after graduation. Conversely, some were reluctant to come because they did not want to recall some of their more negative experiences. However, as a team we fought hard to convince them to come, because every perspective was necessary to give this project value. With countless hours of reading, recording, and transcription, I was able to contribute to phase two of this project and add two more interviews to the collection of over 42 Cardinals of Color imparting their very real experiences here at Ball State.

The project started with extensive research. We began by reading *Ball State University: An Interpretive History* to give us insight on how Ball State University as we know it came to be. It was very interesting to read of all the different changes the university went through to become the inclusive school it is today, and not just culturally but academically. We then read *The Other Side of Middletown: Exploring Muncie's African American Community*. This text gave a background on the initial attempts to understand the African American living experience in Muncie. There were different themes that resounded across the different subjects in the text.

These included the importance of family, community engagement, and spirituality. We focused in on these themes to draw a basis on which to pull parts of the interviews we conducted to create the documentary. We also utilized the University Archives and Special Collections in Bracken Library to find documents in university records pertaining to African American alumni. Lastly, we would not be able to conduct proper interviews without knowing exactly how to record and transcribe. We read *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* along with instruction from Michael Szajewski and Brandon Pieczko from the University Libraries Archives and Special Collections to understand the form and structure of an oral interview. We learned things such as how to format questions during an interview, how to ask them in a timeline perspective, and how to properly format a transcription.

The next phase in our research process included a trip to Washington, D.C. My classmates and I got to explore the city and take opportunities to widen our experiences beyond a text. Our first full day ended with attending the premier of the movie *I Am Not Your Negro*. From this film, I got to see the struggles of the past and present as they pertain to the African American race. This film was based on the unfinished novel by James Baldwin entitled *Remember This House*, recounting issues in race relations through his relationships with civil rights activists including Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as his personal observations. The film also incorporated modern-day issues of social justice. Consequently, I was able to identify improvements in today's culture relating to issues of diversity, but also strides we have yet to take to improve our society.

The last two days, and in my opinion the most important days, of the trip comprised a visit to the National Museum of African American History and Culture. We were fortunate to be

able to visit the museum just a few months after its grand opening as well as during Black History Month. This museum was overwhelmingly informational. From the exterior design, to the interior layout and intentional floor plan to elude an actual travel through time, this museum covered almost every segment of African American history one could ever imagine. There were so many artifacts, collections, and exhibits that it took us two days to cover the entire museum, and we still could not completely wrap our minds around the wealth of knowledge stored in that building. This was a good point to create a stronger team bond as we split into smaller groups to complete an additional writing assignment. The assignment was to split into groups and each member take on a specific floor of the museum and generate questions that pertained to the interviewees based on the artifacts and exhibits in the exhibition galleries. This helped us apply immersive learning and substituted reading a monograph on African American history to create more context for ourselves in a three-dimensional space. We got to learn through experience, and it helped demonstrate the thinking and learning process of our peers, because we all see things differently through our unique perspectives and experiences.

The most important areas to us as students preparing ourselves for these long-form interviews, were the exhibits focused on African Americans and the education experience. These exhibits told the stories of the struggles and triumphs that African Americans have faced for decades to achieve excellence in higher education. There were long standing battles for African Americans to have access to equal education, but with courage and persistence many have been recognized for their accomplishments as graduates from predominantly-white institutions (PWIs), doctorates in math and science, and so much more. Getting a chronology and insight into these experiences of the past were essential in being able to find material to generate ideas and

questions as to what similar experiences our interviewees had in their venture for education at Ball State.

Applying what we had learned through text and travel, each student was asked to conduct two interviews a piece. For my interviews, I served as the interviewer of course, but in the interviews of my peers I also served as camera operator. This was another interesting training component for the project. Only two people in our project group were experienced telecommunications students, so they took the liberty of setting up the lights and equipment in the room, trained us on the equipment, and even wrote a manual for quick reference. This part of the process made the interviews even more special, because these interviews became more personal. Every part of this process had student involvement to some extent, so it did feel like we were bringing history to life. There was significant pressure to make sure lighting, positioning, and sound was correct or else it could ruin the entire process. However, the intense attention to detail made the interviews seem flawless.

This experience for me was life-changing. As an African American woman, the stories I heard were eye-opening. It was interesting to see that so many things have changed since the time of our Cardinals of Color. However, there were also things that were mentioned during the interviews that I had also experienced. For example, in my first interview with Cynda Williams, she spoke of how she was the only African American woman in the Theatre Program at the time. She enjoyed this though, because it forced her to work hard and she gained countless opportunities from it. I too have experienced this, being either the only, or one of two or three, African American in a class. I have also embraced this in my life and used it as a tool to strengthen my work and belief in myself to achieve anything I set my mind to. There were other

tragic instances that made me so grateful that I am living in a more progressive time where people are making active efforts to be inclusive and to decrease the racial tension that surrounds our world. My second interviewee, Muriel Weeden, experienced direct hatred from a professor, but she did not give up. She continued to push through and overcome the obstacles presented to her and achieve academic success. Weeden was the older of the two interviewees, so her experiences came from a time of increased struggle. However, the obstacles she faced and later conquered paved the way for people like Ms. Williams and me to continue in our ventures of education with decreases in obstacles over time. The courage and faith these two women embodied was encouragement for me to continue to rise despite any challenges that I may face. Fortunately, I have not had to encounter nearly as many difficulties as those before me, but it is because of their stories that I continue to strive for success in all facets of life, even outside of the educational sector.

As a current Cardinal of Color, it was very encouraging to hear the stories of the African American alumni speak on the bad times, but also the good times and impart the reasons why, even though not perfect at times, they cherish and value their time at Ball State University. Some of the same reasons I chose to come to Ball State, the African American alumni also chose to come here decades ago. The small, quaint campus; affordable education; countless opportunities to experience and learn new things or create new experiences for all of campus to enjoy. I saw this as a testament to Ball State University. That this is an institution that prides itself on growing and changing any chance it gets to suit the needs of its students.

Since the conclusion of the project, I have been able to share the findings and experience of the African American Alumni Oral History Project. We have presented at conferences on the

impact of the interviews not only on our personal experiences as students, but the impact it has on the campus at large. Some of the challenges I faced were obviously the technical aspect of operating the camera and learning how to conduct an oral interview and create a formal transcript in just a few short weeks. Beyond this, though, I faced the challenge of figuring out how to take the lessons from the stories I heard in these interviews and apply their courage and bravery to my journey. There were so many touching stories that empowered me to figure out what my legacy was in life and here on Ball State's campus. I want to leave a legacy of empowerment, bravery, and the ability to overcome obstacles and be completely you in everything you do. I hope through the connections I have made and the interactions I have had with so many on this campus that this rings true.

The experiences related by these "Cardinals of Color" tell a story that transcends history. The story of wanting more, whether through work or education, and being able to make an honest living for themselves and their families despite the trying circumstances is a battle many people of color can relate to. Many of our interviewees struggled to gain an education at Ball State, and despite all challenges they prevailed and were active members on campus through time, talent, and treasure. A lot of people put themselves on the front line and created safe spaces for people of color to come together and agitate for equality amongst white and non-white students and citizens. For example, Cynda Williams spoke of her minister father's church in Muncie, and the church, especially in the historical context, was a main safe haven for African Americans to come together and celebrate, share woes, and foster children to grow up in better days. In *The Other Side of Middletown* there was mention of black-owned barbershops and beauty salons as communication hubs for African Americans to not only compose themselves in style but also socialize and discuss community issues and ways to rise above the conflict and

disarray. My father is a barber and has owned his own barbershop for over 20 years, so I can attest to the fact that barbershops and beauty salons are huge facet of African American culture and are a venue of gathering and communication within the African American community.

I think this project will serve as a piece of history on its own. Many people will have the opportunity for years to come to view these interviews, and just like myself, be able to gain knowledge and wisdom. Also, they could compare experiences and learn how to navigate their journey here at Ball State and get the most out of their time here. This project will shine light on the positives and negatives to help Ball State administrators, faculty, and students continue to create a more inclusive, kind and generous campus that will continue to grow and prosper for years to come.

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Ball State University Oral Histories

Archival Identification:

Interviewer(s): Marquice Gee

Interviewee(s): Cynda Williams

Videographer(s): Nick Evans

Interview Supervisor: Michael Doyle

Date of interview: March 26, 2017

Gee: Hello, my name is Marquice Gee. Today is Sunday, March 26, 2017, and I'm interviewing Cynda Williams on Ball State's campus as part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project. Welcome Ms. Williams! How are you today?

Williams: I am very well. Glad to be here!

Gee: That's good! So, I would like to begin by starting from the very beginning. You were born May 17, 1966 in Chicago, Illinois, correct?

Williams: Yes, I was.

Gee: So, first off tell us about your parents, what their names were and how it was growing up in Chicago.

Williams: Well I think I should preface it, because I think it's important that I was conceived in Muncie, Indiana. My parents both lived in this area. My mother went to Ball State. My father went to Ball State, and my father moved to Muncie as a senior in high school because his father, Reverend J. C. Williams Senior, is a pastor here at

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Trinity United Methodist Church. And my mother lived in Parker, Indiana, and also went to United Methodist Church, and so that's how they met. Obviously, that was a very interesting thing considering she was white and he was black, and back in those days it was illegal for interracial couples—definitely illegal to marry. So, when my parents got together they went to Ohio where it was legal to

get married, and they got married there. And then my father went away to the army, and my mother came back to Ball State. And she had a lot of issues at the time, because of the fact that she was illegally married to a black man. Then when she got pregnant with a black man's child it became a very—problematic. So, she was in her

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senior year here, and she was in Pathology and in the medical side of things, and she was doing her labs and all of that for the final year. But eventually she got to the point where her pregnancy was visible. She couldn't hide it anymore, and they didn't want her there. So, in my mother's very and last semester of her senior year, fully pregnant with me and by herself, my family was here but she was by herself, she had to move and she had to quit school, and that is how I ended up being born in Chicago. She had a phenomenal teacher here that was very supportive of her and said, "You know what? Come work for me in Chicago." She had just gotten a job in Chicago in some lab, and so my mother moved to Chicago

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fully pregnant with me and got a job, and by the way my mother has always had physical challenges; she had polio. And so, she was constantly having surgeries. So, my mother was very brave and strong to make such a move to a brand-new place where she knew no one except for this one woman, fully pregnant and alone. I was fortunate, and she was fortunate, that my father's family supported her—Her mother—they supported her to a certain degree—and she was able to find a place there, and my Aunt Analee came and helped her when I was born. So, that's my beginnings. So, I say, yes, I'm technically from Chicago, but my real beginnings began here in Muncie, Indiana. Growing up in Chicago,

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I block a lot of things when things aren't great, and there were some difficult times. But for the most part, the neighborhood that we eventually moved in, I was five-years old. Now it's called the Wild, the Wild One Hundreds in Chicago. At that time, when we moved in, it was an all-white neighborhood. Within a year, it completely just switched over. We were, I think, the second black family to move in. I say black family, but, interracial family. But, to move in, and within a year it was completely black. So, I grew up in that circumstance: My mom being white, which at the time in the sixties and seventies, that was not common. And I went from—She went from the white lifestyle in Parker, Indiana to this all black thing. So, my mom was trying to

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look black. She would tan all the time. She got a perm, so she had an afro,

because she wanted to fit in and she tripped some people (laughs) and my— eventually my father got out of the army, and we had a fun life for the most part. You know? I had difficulties, I had things that had happened to me that were challenging that I didn't tell my parents about that I lived through alone. So, that made my experience a little bit more somber, and I was a very quiet child because of some things that had happened to me. But our house was the neighborhood house. Everybody came there: all the kids. It was primarily boys: my brothers. And at some point or another, all my aunts and uncles lived with us at some point. So, I grew up with all male cousins. My sisters, the other girls, didn't come along until my

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sister came, Monica, and I was fourteen, and by then I moved back to Muncie. But I enjoyed my time there. I enjoyed it. I did get to the point, though, that I was ready to go, because the neighborhood was turning into something very dangerous. Gangs were starting to come about. The drug world was starting to come about right in that time. And unfortunately, a lot of the boys that I was very close friends with ended up either passed away, murdered, in gangs, life of crime, in prison. A good deal of the boys that I knew are gone. And so, my father saw this coming, being a Chicago policeman, and as soon as I was supposed to start high school he moved us back to Muncie.

Gee: So how did seeing that violence start to

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build over time—because this was once an all-white community then, like you said, in a matter of a year it went to an all-black community, and then this violence starts to escalate. How did that affect you personally?

Williams: Well, it was, it angered me because my neighborhood was a great neighborhood. It was good people. And all these outside influences started coming in, and they started—all these businesses that were there started shutting down. So, people couldn't find a job and were becoming helpless and hopeless, because they didn't have a way to maintain their households. And so, these drugs are coming in; an easy way to make money. People are getting addicted. I was very angry. Even as a young child, I used to have to deal with walking down the street and being accosted by people. And I remember for

[8:00]

the longest time—It's interesting I'm back in Illinois, because I said I would never live there again because I just didn't like that I had to constantly be on the watch out for my health, and my—that I was going to be okay. And what really precipitated us moving away was that a cat-burglar broke into our house, and he had been doing this and he was he was pretty awful. He was raping the women,

and stealing their things, and he as terrorizing Chicago, the south side of Chicago. And my father was a policeman, and he had timed it. He had obviously cased our house. And and I won't go into the full story, but he just he tried to break in our house twice. The first time he tried to break in our house, my father wasn't there. He was working, but the

[9:00]

window crashed, so it woke us up. We thought it was the wind. A month later, he came back, and this time he got in and that night my father started working, I mean a different shift, so he was home that night. So, I would never forget when this man walks into my room and I woke up by—I felt him. I felt something, and I had a butcher knife under my bed, and I felt him and I had the knife and he walks into my room and he's staring at me and he's grinning and I said, "Daddy?" And then I hear my mother say "Sonny, there's a man in the house. There's a man in the house." And he starts laughing because he thinks he knows that we're alone. He thinks we're bluffing. And then my father wakes up (unintelligible). He knew that we were telling the truth, and he flew. And we moved. Yeah.

[10:00]

Gee: That was it? So, before we continue, I just wanted to get your parents' names.

Williams: Yes, of course. My father's name is Charles Kenneth Williams, and my mother is Beverly Ann Williams. Her maiden name was Connor.

Gee: Okay. So, backing up to your mom. You said that at the time her and your father met, this was a time where interracial couples, and more specifically marriages, were not well accepted if at all. And she was also suffering from polio as well, and correct me if I'm wrong, your father was in the army at the time you were born?

Williams: Yes.

Gee: So, how was seeing your—or knowing at this point—that your mom was going through all these things: she was alone, suffering from polio, she has a child coming, she can't finish school because of the hatred towards her because of the situation she's in. Knowing how she had to live at that time, how has that

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affected you growing up, and into becoming the woman you are now?

Williams: Well, like I said, my mom is very, very strong. She's lived through some amazing things. Eventually, I'm writing now, I will write her story, because the life that

she's led it amazes me. She had a hard time emotionally dealing with life, because I wonder—I say what was the lesson for her? Was her life about breaking patterns? Was her life about her children? Because the things that she went through, the strength that she had, the courage that she had made us like we are, because I never had any excuses. If my mother could do this, why can't I? If my mother could— (pause for mic)

Pause in recording

[12:00]

So, my other was very strong. My mother is amazing. Went through a lot. Had some very emotionally difficult times. Suffered from depression, because of this constant assault of life. Life was very hard for her. And I've often wondered if her life and experiences were also about her children and how her children dealt with life, and the successes of them based on not just my mom but my father. They both went through a lot, and none of us ever could make any excuses because we could always say, Well it could have been worse. Look what mommy went through.

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It could have been worse, look what daddy went through. What our grandparents went through. And I believe that life is about evolution from generation to generation. And I'm hoping that my daughter, when she's older and as she's growing, can look at the things that I've experienced—and I'm very honest with her about my life, I don't hold back—it gives her the impotence to push through whatever challenges she's going through, because she sees that mommy did it. Just like I did.

Gee: Okay. You mentioned that your grandfather is Reverend J. C. Williams, who we actually got to read about in this class, and what we read about him is his activism during the fifties and sixties and the Civil Rights [Movement]. Tell us a little bit about what you know about his participation in that era.

Williams: My grandfather, was Martin Luther King before Martin Luther King was

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Martin Luther King (laughs). My grandfather was doing all those things before the history that we talk about. As a matter of fact, he knew Martin Luther King, Jr. when he was a little boy. And he said he was so surprised that he turned into such a great kid, because he was so spoiled (laughs). But my grandfather was here in Muncie. He ran for mayor. He—his church was to me the true essence of Christianity, because often times Christianity can turn into a social club. His

church was about helping people. It was Christ-like in its mission. He wasn't trying to exclude anyone. We had members of every race that is in this surrounding area. We

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had Aborigine Americans, we had of course black people, we had white people, we had poor people, we had upper class, every class. It was everyone that needed help in any way: emotionally, spiritually, financially, came to the church. It was a constant flow of people, and my grandfather was about—he was like Bernie Sanders (laughs). That was like my grandfather. My grandfather with dark skin was Bernie Sanders of the day.

Gee: (laughs) Right!

Williams: He was all about making sure working people had enough food, so they wouldn't have to concentrate on the basics of life. So they could concentrate on who they were, what their character was like. Make sure that they're living life in such a way that they're giving education to their children; so they have somewhere to go in this life and can see that there's more

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out there for them than this darkness, and this hopelessness, and this racism, and this prejudice. And that if we all come together and love each other, and work together, and serve each other, that we can make this world a better place. That was my grandfather. And it was very interesting, because like a lot of very powerful moving men and women, their family can get lost because their mission takes over. Their people become their family, and so it was confusing sometimes for me because I completely respected and loved everything about what my grandfather was doing in this city and beyond, but I saw my uncles and aunts and my father, Hey!!

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We're over here! (laughs). And sometimes they got lost in that, because my grandparents were so active and everyone was their kid, and everyone was their grandchild and ever—I had a special relationship with my grandfather for some reason. I don't know why? He considered me more of a peer than a child, it was weird. He would talk to me about everything. Dark things, happy thing, spiritual things. The truth about his family life, and where he came from, and how hard it was. He was very open with me, so I have a very special relationship with him. He always used to say, "You're the one that's going to take over for me. You're the one that's going to follow in my footsteps. Not my kids." And I was like, "Why not your kids?" So, I was caught up in this confusion

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because I'm like, "Your kids are just as special, and just as smart, and just—and have as much to give as me, or as you because they're from you." But for him they—that generation was about something else. So, I had a conflicted relationship with my grandfather. I never put him on a pedestal like so many people did. Never did. Because I knew his frailties, I knew his vulnerabilities, because he shared them with me. He was very honest with me about things, and I love him very much and I feel like he's still with me. Just like I feel like my grandmother—I had a very special relationship with both of my grandmothers., although my grandmother on my mother's side came along later. But I feel like they're still with me, and leading me, and helping me, and—my grandfather did huge things.

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And he's—I believe that people like him, he wasn't the only one, opened the door for the Martin Luther King's. And they were the reason why they were able to do what they did.

Gee: Do you feel like you have stepped into that role of carrying on for him, as he mentioned?

Williams: In certain ways, certainly. My grandfather was a writer. He wrote a lot, and I'm writing now. And I am a part—I participate in a nonprofit here called Guiding Light that William Lee started. His thoughts, my thoughts, and a few other people I've met here in Muncie when I came, finally came back to Muncie, our thought is if we can change the world here we can change the world anywhere. Because of the poverty, and the lack, and the fear, and the violence, and the drugs, we feel that if we can

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be a part of change in Muncie, the middle America (??), then everywhere can change. If we can shift perceptions, if we can bring people together—and that is kind of what my grandfather did. As a matter of fact, William Lee reminds me of my grandfather very, very much. Very much. An evolved version of my grandfather. But, me—when I do my speaking, when I do my writing, I think he channels me sometimes. Because I literally, when I when I speak will say, Okay God, just use my mouth because I don't know who these people are, or what I need to say, so you just do it. And I don't even remember sometimes the things that come out, you know. So yeah I guess I would be like him.

Gee: Now you touched on this a few times. Your mother is white, and your father is black, which means you

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grew up biracial. How did you handle this growing up, and how did you choose to identify as black or white?

Williams: (sighs) It's funny, I was just talking about this today. When I grew up in Chicago, like I said, I was surrounded by black people. I was surrounded by black people. I think I had one white teacher. And it was a good experience. And then there was my mother, you know. For quite some time, it changed, I didn't have a good relationship with my mother's side of the family. I didn't know anything about them, because I was hidden. Because it was okay for my mother and my father to be friends through the church, but it wasn't okay for two mixed races. So, there were issues in her family, and I mean I was an adult before I even knew about the family. I never heard of them, never met them.

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I met a cousin in in Los Angeles of all places, in an acting class, and that's how I started to get to know about that side of the family. So, I was comfortable in that world. I didn't have any issues with white people, because white people went to my grandfather's church. And when I would come back to Muncie, which was every summer, I would be with those people and they were wonderful, you know. But I didn't know them. Then when I moved back to Muncie, I had a very different experience. Like the church fell apart, my grandparents got a divorce, after 45 years of marriage.

Gee: Wow!

Williams: Some of the white people that I had been close to changed their tune and treated me differently. And then I went to Northside High School, at the time, where it was I think 1 percent black people. And I was very, very mistreated. So, for a

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while I had an—and I had a really bad experience with my grandmother. I went to my grandmother's house, surprised to surprise her, and they wouldn't let me in because it was during the day. And then I started remembering that I'd always went there at night, so they were hiding us. And so, I had a moment of (noise) of real angst towards white people. I was just like my mom is just a fluke, my mom is different. Then, I met different teachers at Northside: Mrs. Nancy Crouse, Mr. John Winning. I can't remember the principal and the assistant principal's names, but they were very, very supportive. So, I had a negative experience with the kids, but the adults helped me to develop into

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who I am today. I knew I wanted to sing, but I didn't know I wanted to act until I went to Northside and Nancy Crouse said, "You are talented, and I'm going to

make sure we're doing plays in this school that you can be a part of." And she would cast me in plays that parents were upset about. She made me Nancy In *Oliver*, the lead female in *Oliver*. She got so much flack for that, because, She's in England. How's this black girl going to be Nancy? They really put her through the ringer, and she did not care what they—she said, "I don't care what you say. We are doing this." And then we did *Raisin in the Sun*, which is an all-black cast. My brother was in it. And she found kids to do that show. She's like, "These kids are a part of this population, and to deny them the chance

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to be creative is unthinkable, and I refuse to do it." So, that shifted my perceptions. And then I came to Ball State, which I had no intention of doing. I had every intention of moving to Atlanta and going to Spelman. That's what I wanted to do. I was like, I need to get away from this and go back to me! You know this is me over here. I want to go to Spelman College, which is an all-black women's college. And, or traditionally black. I'm sure there are other races there now. But, my mom got pregnant with my youngest sister of my parents. There's five of us. I have two little sisters now, also. My father remarried. And I cried when she—because they weren't even together anymore. They just got together one more time, and she got pregnant. I cried, because I was like, I'm 16 years old. I'm ready to

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move. I'm ready to get out of Muncie. I don't want to be here! And I had to stay, because I had to help my mother. She's physically challenged, she's depressed because my parents aren't together anymore. My brothers are knucklehead teenagers, and there's two little girls. I couldn't go anywhere, so I stayed because I was helping. I was mommy and daddy to those kids. And it was the best thing that could happen to me, because I came here and there was Beth. Beth May back then, Beth Turcotte now. Don LaCasse, who at the time was new to Ball state theatre. He was the chair. The teachers that I had here were phenomenal. And there were—

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I think I might have been, when I started, the only black girl that was in the theatre program. And that changed in the time that I was here. They changed my life, because they cross-cast. They tried to think of things for me to be in. "It doesn't matter, this play race is not an issue. We're going to do this play, so you can be in it." And, I did a lot of musical theatre, because I'm a singer also. I—and they started doing things at the Civic Theatre in Muncie. So, I was in a play or a musical nonstop for seven years straight. From high school, all the way through college. That is how I was able to go have a career, because I was ready. I never stopped. All year long. Everybody else was partying, everybody else was doing

all these

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other things. I was doing a musical, a play, I was singing at church, I had my own band. I was constantly preparing. That was my life. That was my social life. And that was all I cared about. And that's what I did. And these people made sure that I could. If I had gone to Spelman, great school that it is, my life would have gone in a completely different rode, but I don't think I would have healed when it came to the pain that I experienced when it came to the racism. I don't think I would have healed. I think I would have been set back in my growth as a person, as a human being. Being here helped me with that, helped me forgive. And I had positive and negative experiences with blacks and whites. And what I came to the conclusion of was people are just people and they just messed up no matter what.

Gee: Right.

Williams: You know?

[29:00]

People are just people, and we differentiate ourselves, and we have egos, and you have to feel better than somebody. So, I love them all, and I forgive them all, and I move forward. So, if you say to me, "What do you identify? Black or white?" In this country, I identify as black because if you got one drop you black, right? And I am very comfortable and proud of my black heritage. But neither do I deny my white heritage. And you know I just celebrated St. Patrick's Day. My mother comes from Scott-Irish, and I celebrate that. On Columbus Day, I celebrate the Aborigines, because I have Cherokee and Blackfoot. I celebrate them all, you know? I have a lot of Spanish in me from my grandmother's s—I celebrate Cinco de Mayo. I celebrate all of it. So, I'm an American,

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cause that's what Americans are essentially, we're just everything.

Gee: Right.

Williams: We're not one thing or another.

Gee: So how do you feel—how does it make you feel knowing that you grew up in this black environment, you come back to Muncie and have this, essentially a culture shock, and you have these teachers putting their foot down, going to bat for you? Do you feel that that might have pushed you in the direction in having the passion for acting that you do now?

Williams: Oh yes! They—If I hadn't had the opportunity, if I hadn't had the shows to show me how much, how good I was for one, and how much passion I had and how much fun and how much joy it brought in my life, I may not have done it. I mean I'm a smart girl, I think I could have done anything and been successful. I think I could have been—nothing to do with blood. No, no doctors.

[31:00]

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: But, in business, and I'm—I could have been successful at anything, but I don't know if I would have had the joy.

Gee: That you have now—

Williams: Um-hm!

Gee: —with acting?

Williams: Yes!

Gee: Okay, so you mentioned that you were the only black student in your theatre program at the time you were here. How did that—Was that another challenge that you had to go through? Or how did that help you grow in your profession and as a student here at Ball State?

Williams: Oh, I didn't care. You know? I didn't miss black people, because all I was thinking about was my lines, and if I was gone be real, and all other kind of—I just really forgot about race when I was working. I just didn't think about it. It was brought to my attention a few times. But then, I have a very easy time blocking negativity. I coped that way. I just forget about it, and I move forward all the time. One part of my life was very interesting.

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I was never into the soror thing. The sorority/fraternity thing. I call myself Me-Phi-Me—

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: —because I wasn't about a group. I grew up in a great big family, surrounded with church. I didn't need that, you know? And so, I didn't get that experience that way, which you would think I would, but I didn't. But when it really came to my attention, the black/white thing again, was when I—it was suggested to me that I do Miss Ball State. They said, "You need to do Miss Ball State. Don't you need more money?" Because I wanted to move off campus. I was living in the dorms,

and I was having an—I did not have a good experience in the dorms, both years I had very interesting—great stories to tell, but not positive experiences. At the time, I wasn't comfortable living with my roommates.

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That wasn't good. It was great in in that I learned how to cope in conflict, but I had been dealing with conflict my whole life. I just wanted to work on learning. So, my final year I wanted to move out. I didn't know how I was going to do it financially, because I was getting grants, I was getting, you know, a theatre scholarship. I had academic scholarship, and so I had enough money to pay for school, and I'd gotten a little—now its likes hundreds of thousands, and I think my loan was just three thousand dollars. Isn't that crazy? Well I wanted to live off campus, so—and I didn't have time to work a job. So how do I do that? Somebody said, "Do Miss Ball State! That'll pay for your living off campus." And I had never considered pageants, I'm not that kind of girl. Not a girly-girl believe it or not!

Gee: (laughs)

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Williams: I'm not into the flowers and the frill, I'm not into the—I'm just not. I'm very down to earth, and a tomboy because I grew up with all boys.

Gee: Right.

Williams: But it was money. And I was like, Why not? So, I went for it. I got so much flack from people, black people, because I didn't do Miss Black Ball State. "Why aren't you doing Miss Black Ball State? Why would you do Miss Ball State?" And I just couldn't understand that? I was like, "Why would I confine myself to competing against just one race of people, when I can compete against everybody? This is the world we live in. I don't live in Africa. I live in the United States of America where I'm going to have to compete with everybody. Why would I just compete with blacks, black women? I want to do Miss Ball State and so should you!

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Matter of fact, I don't even necessarily think we need a Miss Black Ball State anymore. They not telling you can't be in this. Be in this instead, so you can compete against them, because that's who you're going to be competing against in the world!"

Gee: Right.

Williams: Oh, I had so much hate for that. They were mad at me. "You think you better than

us." "No I don't! I think I'm—I want to compete against the people I'm going to be competing against in the world. And I want to do something, and I don't want to just be successful in that little pond. I want to be successful in the ocean." So, I did. And it was interesting, because I won! I won Miss Ball State—

Gee: Yes!

Williams: —which was very cool! I think, maybe there have been one other black girl, but I don't know? I hear two stories: someone says I was the second, someone says I—a lot of people say I was the first black Miss Ball State. I have no idea? That will be for you to find out.

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Then I went to Miss Indiana. And that's when racism reared its ugly head again. And I had two experiences that year. That's when I really knew I just got to love and forgive people. So, I did Miss Indiana my senior year, and I did competition for Black Expo. (pause for background noise) Got it! So, I had two experiences in the same year. I went to Miss Indiana. The competition was (unintelligible) "I can win in this! I'm gone go to Miss America! I can do this; I can do this." And because I'm a good singer—okay I'm a great singer! (laughs)

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: And I had the look, I had the—I learned how to walk, I learned

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how to be a girl. I did all those things. I learned how to smile all the time, and be comfortable with it and all the tricks so you wouldn't hurt your face. I learned it all. I was a great interviewer. I was smart. I was at that point, I was you know, I graduated cum laude, so I was you know academically on top of things. And (sighs) we got to the competition, the competition happens, and I get third runner up. And the audience is like, What? Nobody can believe it! The girl that won was the cutest little country singer. She was about five foot. She was very attractive in her way, but not the Miss America way. And nobody understood what was happening. And I saw the judges, and I saw this confusion, and I saw the people that were running the pageant and they were like, What in the world?

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I was devastated. I was devastated, because I thought this was how my life was going to open up to the world because I was gone be on Miss America. Afterwards, they did something I think that probably—they may not have done before. I was with my boyfriend at the time, and I was with my parents, and the people that ran the pageant came up to me and they were just drawn and pale and

the man said, "We just want to tell you that we are so sorry. You are Miss In—you are Miss Indiana." I say, "No I'm not, I'm third runner up." They say, "We have a judge from down South who gave you zero points because she did not want you to win." She said, "I will not

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allow Indiana have a nigger be Miss Indiana. I will not have another Vanessa Williams," because it was after the experience with Vanessa Williams. She gave me zero points, but the other judges had scored me so high that I still placed. So, I still got a little bit of scholarship, but I couldn't possibly win with zero points from a judge. She got banned from ever judging again, and she said it was worth it. It was worth it. So, my life wasn't supposed to go that way. Very soon after that I had this experience of Black Expo. It was a competition. I chose not to sing, because I was like, I want to act." So, I did the acting competition. And I did a monologue that my uncle had written that was about being black. It was a beautiful

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monologue. Beautiful monologue. I placed, but I didn't win. Again, same reaction. Audience booed. They booed. They came up to me, they were like, "But you're not black. You're not black. Why'd you even do this? Why didn't you sing? You're not black enough to do a monologue about being black! Look at your hair! You're so, you're so light! You're not really black!" So, I lost that competition, also. To make up for it, they asked me to sing as a guest star for the big event, and I did, but it was like, Wow! People are just people! People are just people. And it turned out, the girl that won was (laughs) related to one of the judges!

[41:00]

Gee: Of course!

Williams: And so, did it make me bitter? No! Did it make me understand I had a long road ahead, and I was going to constantly have to, you know, leap over these obstacles, because of self-hate and confusion, and not understanding our oneness? Yeah. It just strengthened me more. Just strengthened me more.

Gee: So, you lose one competition because you're black. You lose another competition because you're not black.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: How does that crossroad—how did that crossroad at that time make you feel, and how did you not become defeated in your passion?

Williams: Well, I had my mother and I had my father and I had all these people that had nothing stop them from moving forward. I mean,

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who was I to quit? I couldn't quit. I knew who I was. I knew what I could do, and I knew that I was going to do something. And all this was was obstacles to teach me something new. And I really did think that way. I'm very old! (laughs) I was very old, you know? Coming up being the oldest in the situation that I was with my mom. I mean my mom said I learned how to walk at six months, because I had to walk. I didn't have—I was potty-trained and I was walking by then because she couldn't carry me. She couldn't! So, I had to walk with her to wherever I was going. So, it started that soon, where I had to grow up and I had to accept, Okay, life has challenges. Things happen. You know? And I've had to have therapy and all that kind of stuff to get through a lot of experiences, but

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I think when things happen to you, you can make one of two choices: One, you can be defeated, quit, and become bitter and hateful and blame the world. Or two, you could say, This is just life, this is my lessons that I'm learning to take me to the next place, and keep on moving. You know? Those are your choices.

Gee: Right. So, going back to your experience here at Ball State. You had your community in the theatre world. Outside of that, what was your educational and social environment like here at Ball State during your time here?

Williams: Socially I didn't have a life. (laughs) I think I went to one party in four years? And I was very religious. Okay? I grew up in the church, going to church six days a week. And at that party there was orgies and drugs,

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and none of the stuff I was interested in. So, that was it for me. I was like, Ehh. This is boring. You know? And at the time I didn't drink. (whispers) I do now. (laughs)

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: At the time, I didn't drink, and I definitely didn't do drugs or none of that kind of stuff, and I was saving myself for marriage, and I wasn't interested in that scene. So, I was like, Okay, well I saw it. I went, I did it (unintelligible). Not interested. And so, I didn't have a lot of friends because I wasn't a part of that. And being a theatre major, I was a big part of that. So, I didn't have—I worked with people, I liked people, but I wasn't friends with people. Until my senior year—Well, I had my boyfriend, but we broke up because he wanted to hang out and I didn't. So, he

did his thing. I mean, he was a hormonal teenage boy and of course he gone go get that!

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: He wasn't getting it here! (laughs) So, he went and did his thing and I went to school. My senior year I met my best friend.

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Who is still my best friend today. She was a year younger than I am, she was a junior. And literally, it was a summer, Summer Stock, and I was sitting by myself like I always am. And I heard this little voice (high-pitched voice), "I need a roommate! Is there anybody here that needs a roommate?" I said, "I need a roommate!" She goes, "Hey! Cindy!" Cause everybody knew who I was (laughs). "Cindy, I'm back. Come back and meet me!" And that's how I made my first and best friend at Ball State. I just talked to her yesterday. She's still my best friend, and we ended up moving to New York together and we moved—we lived in Arizona. And you know. It's an ongoing friendship. Beth Wagner. Her father was a professor here, a math professor here for many

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years. He just recently passed. So socially no, I didn't have a life. But when it comes to everything else, I really—I just kind of stuck to that world. I was too busy to do much else. And then I still had my church kind of. I was going to church, but I was exploring other things. I was learning about other religions. In my church, my grandfather was very good about teaching us about all the religions, because he was like we all love God, you know? Even those that don't know it, we all love God. And so, we learned about other religions, but when I was in college I started exploring my spirituality in other ways. I started meditating, started learning about chakras, started really diving into my spirituality. And seeing that Christianity was definitely a road to wholeness, but there were other roads, too, and that was okay.

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And I found that for me I—Jesus is my, you know, the one I pray to the one I see and the one I walk with, but I also commune with nature and I love all people no matter their decisions when it comes to how they come to wholeness—

Gee: Right.

Williams: —and oneness with God. So, I was experiencing all those things. That was the one thing that would take me away from just the acting and the singing. And I had a wonderful—I cannot remember her name—I had a wonderful vocal coach who

was a vocal coach in the music department. When I first came to Ball State, I didn't know if I was going to be a music major or a theatre major. I had no idea, because I loved them both. And I remember when I met with her, I was like, "I don't

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know what to do. I don't know which one—I'm undeclared, because I don't know which one to do." And she said, "Do you want to be a music teacher, or do you want to be a singer?" I said, "I want to be a singer." And she said, "Coach with me, and be a theatre major because singers need to know how to perform."

Gee: Right.

Williams: So, that's what I did. Back in those days, didn't have musical theatre programs yet. I would have done that, you know, had that been there. But you know, my spirituality and theatre, acting, singing with my band and all that kind of stuff, that was my world.

Gee: So, while you were here, John E. Worthen was the president at the time, and his big focus was university technology. How was technology incorporated into your education while you were here?

Williams: It wasn't. (laughs) I didn't know nothing about techno—

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technological anything until much, much later. It wasn't a part of my story at the time. It has become a huge part of my story now, you know, cause I'm a writer and everything and so the revolution, the tech revolution has become obvious part of my life, but at that time no.

Gee: Okay. In a 1986 edition of the *Ball State Daily News*, there was an article on the issue of minority enrollment and they were wanting to focus on maybe creating a program like the IU Groups program. What was the racial climate and your perception on diversity while you were here at Ball State?

Williams: There weren't that many kids of color and they segregated themselves, the ones that did. Umm I remember in my dorms, I don't remember any other girls that

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looked like me. I was it. I don't remember. And I lived in the dorms it was all girls, and it was (laughs) it was mainly gay girls. It was a lot of lesbianism, how I got introduced to that world. I'd never been a part of that before. I saw things I was like, Aaahh! I mean now it's like, (unintelligible) whatever. I lived in

Hollywood for 18 years.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: But (laughs) that, at the time, was new to me, and—But racially, it just, because I wasn't a part of those social groups—And people let me alone. I mean, I had my experiences with racism of course, you know. I had a few with my roommates. Both were—there were issues with racism. They were nice girls too; they just didn't know. They were both from small white towns, and they all of a sudden, living with the only negro

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in the whole building (laughs) and it was hard for them. And they coped different ways. And so, it wasn't a very good experience for me, but it was a learning experience for me. I wasn't really paying attention enough to be able to answer that question truly, except to say it was very segregated and—but when it came to my teachers I never—I don't remember one experience having a racial issue. Not one. I was here at a very good time.

Gee: Now you mentioned your experiences with your roommates while you were here. Would you mind expanding on one of those experiences?

Williams: Not a problem! I was, my first year—This is my first year away from my family, even though they were just right across the way, it was the first time moving away from my family. And I was very excited, you know, I think, I was like, I'm gone be a great

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roommate! And I think I'm one of the best roommates ever, because I'm very neat, I'm very clean, I don't mind working, I don't mind sharing because I had to share with so many people. You know? This girl took that to a completely other—a new level. Now at the time I was dating a boy, a white guy, that I started seeing. He was my very first boyfriend at Northside. Boy, did he suffer for that! So, he had his own apartment, so often times I would go over there. By then I was a sophomore, and I would go over and stay with him in his apartments, The Lofts. He lived in The Lofts downtown. Because I wasn't comfortable there, because she just took over the room. I'm neat! She wasn't; she was a slob. I mean stuff everywhere. And she did not understand boundaries, because

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I wasn't important to her. I was me; I was this little black girl. And she was nice, don't get me wrong; she was very nice, but she—her perception of me was less than. I wasn't—I was less than her. So, she was very comfortable with—One time

I came home, and all my drawers were open, and all—I had like a makeup drawer and a jewelry drawer. My jewelry was everywhere; my makeup was everywhere. She and a girl, who was in my bed! In my bed!

Gee: Wow!

Williams: Were in my things. Using my makeup, trying on my jewelry. I was mortified. I was like, "Why are you in my things? Why do you think that it is okay for you to be in my things?" "Oh, I'm sorry. I

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just, you know? We're just hanging out." I'm like, "Don't hang out with my stuff! Hang out with your stuff! I would like you to put everything away, and I'm going to leave while you do it, because I'm very angry right now, and I don't want to be improper. So, put my stuff away, and when I come back, be out of my bed so I can clean my sheets." I dealt with things like that all the time. Came to a head when, it was in the spring, year was almost over. I'd been dealing with these kind of things throughout. I have asthma, so I have a fan. I always keep a fan, because it's the only thing that would, for so many reasons, calm me from having asthma attacks. The cool air, the breeze, the sound; it helps me. To this day I use a fan.

[55:00]

It doesn't matter how cold it is outside—

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: —because that was the only thing that would stop me from going to full blown asthma attack. And I came home, and it was hot and my fan was gone. My fan wasn't there. I was livid! She was there; she was asleep in her bed. And so, I proceeded to start getting my things ready for the next day. I'm so (unintelligible). I got my clothes out of the closet. I had my little ironing board; I'm ironing my clothes. I have a habit of talking out loud to myself. I have always talked out loud to (laughs) myself, or conversations that I want to have with other people and I'm unconsciously doing it. I guess I was saying everything out loud.

Gee: Um-hm.

Williams: Yeah I said some pretty awful things, I think. I didn't know I was saying it out loud.

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I was just mad. And so, I—after I finished ironing my clothes, I laid down there. And I was worried about sleeping. I was like, How am I going to sleep? I went

into the bathroom, and when I was in the bathroom washing up I heard this loud "BANG!" And after I finished, I was like, Oh, I wonder what that was? I went out, and the door was open and the fan was sitting in the doorway, and she was gone. I was like, Oh! Hmm, I wonder how she knew? Ok, awesome! The next day, I came home, which was unusual. I normally stayed out at the library, Student Center, somewhere else. But that day I came home, and she was packing. And she said, "You're just not right. You're not right! You're so mean. I can't believe you were saying those things!" And I said, "Well what'd I say? What? I'm sorry! What?" She's like, "So what I let somebody use your fan? It's hot! You weren't here!"

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(laughs) She said—she goes, "And to call me fat! Why did you call me fat? I can't help it! I have a physical disorder that makes me fat!" I was like, "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to call you fat! I don't even remember saying that!" She said, "You called me a fat slob!—

Gee: (gasps)

Williams: —And that was the meanest thing anybody's ever said to me! That was the meanest thing. I will never talk to you again." And she moved out, and I had the place to myself for the last two (laughs) months of school. And I remember, at first, I felt horrible. I was like, I did not mean to hurt her. I feel so bad! Felt so bad, for about five minutes.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: And then I was like, She is gone! Yes! Yes! I'm sorry I hurt her feeling, but she been on my nerve for all this time and she's gone now so God bless her!

Gee: (laughs) Okay, so in that same 1986 edition, there was

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also an article about a play, *Raisin in the Sun*, by director James Hardin at that time. And they had the opportunity to travel to Ireland for some awards they had won. Were you a part of that group?

Williams: I was! I was!

Gee: How was that experience for you?

Williams: Oh, my gosh! It was wonderful! It was amazing! I had already done *Raisin in the Sun* in high school. I played Beneatha? I think that was her name? Beneatha? Or Dorothy? I get confused, I've played a lot of characters. I think it was Beneatha?

Beneatha! Which is the daughter, right? And so, I was very familiar with the character already. And my uncle, James Williams, who is one of my main mentors, played Walter Lee. A woman that went to my church played Mama. I didn't know the kid. They got a real, you know—he was the right age to play Travis. The guy that played the African prin—African prince. He wasn't a prince, but

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an African love interest for me. But it was phenomenal! It just happened to fall on a year where they did not have competitions through the states. They chose a group to represent the United States. So, they chose us—

Gee: Wow!

Williams: —to represent the United States. And I'd only flown once before. I was talking about this earlier how I took a flight from Chicago and it was terrifying. That was my first flight. I flew from Muncie to Chicago, and it was thunder storming, and it was only a few seats. So, I was afraid to fly, but I'm having to fly to Ireland. And so, this was my second time on an airplane, and oh it was beautiful! It was so much fun. We were in of course, you know, the pole seats, you know, we're all tight together and everything.

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But we had so much fun! My boyfriend went, and my aunt went because her son was playing—Oh okay! I was confused. My cousin Akbar, Akbar Shabazz, played Travis. He played Travis. And my—So my aunt got to go because he was a minor. And so, it was a family affair. We were there, I can't remember how long? Maybe a week? A little over a week? I'll never forget flying from the ocean, the blue, blue, blue, blue, blue ocean to the yellow fields of Ireland. And then the green. (sighs) And like I said I've always embraced who I am, and I'm Irish. I got a lot of Irish in me. And I felt like I was going home. And, you know, I expected all these redheads and everything, and they looked nothing like that where we were. We went to Dundalk,

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Ireland. Which was, at the time, it was very violent. A lot of the religious fighting was happening at the time. But Dundalk was a place where everybody could go. So, there were southern and northern Irish there. No fighting allowed. That's where the show was. And we won! We won! My uncle won for best actor, best play. And it was beautiful, and not only did we do the show and affect a lot of people in a positive way, they had never seen a show like that about people of color. They related to it. It was—has a universal message. Also, we got to sing and we would—because I think I was—Was I seventeen? I don't remember? But

there I was old enough to drink.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: I still didn't drink, but I went to the pubs. And so, I got to hang out with the people, I used to—got to go to the dance

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clubs. And then my uncle and I did a lot of performing around the different places. We went to Dublin. Got to perform, got to sing in the pubs. And then I was learning Irish music. It was just, it was a phenomenal experience. It's funny you mention it, because I'm writing my second book now, which is self-help memoirs, and I'm writing about that right now, the Ireland experience. It was amazing.

Gee: Okay, so we've briefly went over this earlier, but in 1987 you did become the first African American Miss Ball State!

Williams: Oh cool! I was the first! Yay! (laughs)

Gee: Yeah you were the first!

Williams: Uh huh!

Gee: I know we already went over this a little bit, but just what are the key moments you remember about that process?

Williams: Well, when I won, I truly—when I won Miss Ball State—I truly had no clue that I would win. I really didn't, because it was new territory

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for me. So, when they crowned me Miss Ball State—I brought the crown—I was completely flabbergasted and had no words, because I didn't expect it. I didn't think that they would vote for me. And the people that were there supporting me were so lovely. Rob Loy, who was from the Miss America pageant world, was there, and he was so awesome and that was a moment I'll never forget. And I have, because of my background and I think because of the things that I've lived through, I have a very odd way of showing joy; I start crying! (laughs)

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: I'm not the "Yyaaayy!!!" kind of girl. I'm the (pretends to sob) "I can't believe that happened to me!" kind of girl.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: And I remember crying and feeling so blessed because

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I knew that in my way this was a part of change. For Muncie, it was a part of change. This place where I'd been so dogged out by white people had just crowned me Miss Ball State. It was huge. Preparation for Miss Indiana was a whole lot of fun, because I think a lot of things that I learned helped me in my life later. How to communicate with people, because the training that I did for Miss Ball State was all me trying to guess. The training that I received for Miss Indiana was professional help. They—people really teaching me how to walk, people really teaching me how to communicate in such a way that'll help me to win. That was very, very helpful in my life. Also, you know, learning how to shape my body, because at that

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point I never, because of my asthma, I wasn't very athletic. I danced, but not a lot because I would have asthma attacks and pass out. And I got—I had a guy there that I was dating who was a bodybuilder, and for the first time I started going to the gym and learning how to shape my body because I never liked the way my body was shaped. I was very thin. I didn't realize it at the time, I thought I was fat. It's crazy! Throughout the years you're like, I'm so fat! And then the next decade you're another fifteen pounds and like, I'm so fat! And every time get bigger. But I didn't like my body. He helped me shape my body. I remember liking the way my legs looked for the first time. They had that athletic shape. So, physically I was learning things, and that was a whole lot of fun. It was a new journey. Doing—representing the school, you know, learning how to be comfortable talking

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to people. As an actress, I had no problem. And I guess I was a youth pastor, so I preached, but that's a different world than speaking to pe—someone representing a university.

Gee: Right.

Williams: So, I learned that. So, there were a lot of special moments.

Gee: That's great! And that was in '87, your junior year. Eighty-eight, you're approaching graduation, exciting time! You were in a group, called Spirit, with your Uncle James Williams.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: I read a little bit about it, and you guys didn't refer to yourselves as your typical music group. It was more of a creative outlet.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: Tell me more about how that group functioned, and how you guys performed.

Williams: Well, my uncle and I, we started a group in Muncie for low to moderate income families to have a way for their children to learn how to act, learn how to sing.

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So, we had that group, and out of that came Spirit. So, we danced. We sang all kind of music. The music, it wasn't gospel, just spiritual Christian music anymore. We actually started singing more popular music, but only if it had a positive message. We had a mixed group of people. Doc Peterson played with us, who is a big name in Muncie, Indiana. Michael Hayden, who is my uncle, was our guitarist. Tazzy, Cathy, his sister, sang background. Dirk Etchison, who also was—that was my first boyfriend, and he went to Ball State also—he was in the band. He sang. It was a mixed group, interracial mixed. We performed all over the place,

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and it was so much fun! And I was just one of the lead singers, and it was amazing and it was a creative time. And we wrote music, and my uncle was a great lyricist and we did a lot of his original music. And it was awesome!

Gee: So, with that experience—You were obviously going on the theatre track, performing, acting, but you were in this musical group as a singer, you came into Ball State wanting to sing. How did you submit yourself in knowing you wanted to pursue acting more than becoming a singer?

Williams: At that time, I didn't know that. I consider myself a singer first, because I never stopped singing. Even though I was doing all this acting, I was singing the entire time. I'm telling you, I never stopped. I was singing somewhere, acting somewhere, dancing somewhere, and very well in school. I loved school! I loved college! So much more

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than high school! I despised high school. But college, I thrived in my classes. I loved it! I almost was a science major, I mean minor, because I took so many science classes. I loved science. I love science! I still do! I was just so busy—But

I sang all the time, because I sang in the church choir, I sang in the group, I sang in the musicals, so I consider myself a singer first. So, when I went off to do my thing in the world and I got Mo' Better Blues, I had to make a decision from that point which one I was going to focus on. And because I sang and acted in that movie, and the reason why I went towards the acting was because I experienced the world of music. Not the actual singing part of it, but the "world" of it, and I

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didn't like it. I wasn't interested in the things that they did. I wasn't interested in the parties and the drugs. I just wasn't interested in it. And I could act and stay out of that. They still did it there, but it wasn't such an intimate part of it. I could keep myself away from that. Now, did it affect my career? Yes, because friends hire friends! And I wasn't a friend. I wasn't—I chose not to be a friend to that world. So, I didn't work as much as other people, because I didn't want that world. I wanted to act, but I didn't want to live that kind of lifestyle. So, I figured with singing, I said, Look, I can always have a band. I can always sing. I don't care if I'm not making money at it. And so, that's what I did. I continued singing. I was in bands. That was the other thing.

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I had a record deal. I had a record deal, but they wanted me to sing a style of music I didn't want to sing. I was like, That's not who I am! I want to sing songs that mean something. I don't want to sing about love and sex all the time. I want to sing about what's happening in the world. Like I was a Tracy Chapman kind of girl. You know, I want to say something. And this was before Tracy Chapman. This was before Alanis Morissette. I was doing that kind of music before they came. I was singing those kind of lyrics before they came. I was in, you know, rock 'n' roll bands in LA [Los Angeles]. We performed all over the place, but I never made a lot of money. As a matter of fact, it was so hilarious. We had this big show with a lot of record people come, you know. The studio came—the studios came to see Cynda Williams. And I had cut off all my hair. I had really short hair. I wore funky clothes.

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I was never Clarke Bentancourt. That's not—I was playing a part. I was not a jazz singer. I didn't know anything about jazz until I did that movie. I wasn't a jazz singer. I wasn't a torch singer. I was a social-consciousness singer. And we did this huge concert. And I got (unintelligible) all these people. "Oh my gosh! You were so great! You were wonderful! You were wonderful! We got to talk. We've got to do this; we've got to do that! Where's Cynda?" They didn't know. They were looking for Clarke Bentancourt. They were looking for the hair, and the dress. I had on combat boots, and a skirt that was plaid and, you know, some form-fitting top with leather. (laughs) You know? I wasn't who—I wasn't Cynda.

I was some other girl. That they were actually interested in! Until

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they realized I was Cynda, and they wanted an easy sell. They knew they could sell Clarke Bentancourt, because Clarke Bentancourt had already gone to number six on the R&B Charts. They knew they could sell that. They didn't know if they could sell me, because nobody was like me. Nobody's like this band. This mixed, interracial rock 'n' roll band, talking about life, and you know, going back to the sixties folk kind of lyrics. They didn't have anything like that. And they didn't want to work. They didn't want to break any rules and bring someone new onto the scene that would say something. Nothing wrong with love songs. Nothing. But, at that point love songs—you know Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey. That was the big thing. That was the money. And that's what they wanted me to be. And that's not who I was, and I was like, I'd rather act.

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Gee: Pausing on that break out role, which we'll get back to in a sec. You're graduating now. Moving on into the world. Figuring out what you want to do. At your point of graduation, what was the value of your education?

Williams: It was so huge! I remember my junior year, or my sophomore year, I worked—I don't remember if it was sophomore year? Whatever. I worked as a professional singer one summer in Michigan, upstate Michigan, and it was a phenomenal experience, and I made a lot of money. I was waitressing, and they would tip me based on the singing. And when I came back to school, it was extremely difficult to finish, because I was like, I don't need this. I love it! But I don't need it. I need to get out there and start working. I know I can make money as a singer. And

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my vocal coach said to me, she said, "Why are you here? Right out of school you could have gone out there, and I think you would have already done something. Why are you here? Why did you go to school?" And I said, "Because no one in my family has ever graduated from college." She said, "Isn't that a good reason to finish?" "Yeah, that's why I'm here." So, even though I was frustrated, and just so excited to get out there, I stayed and I finished and I continued to learn. And I did some great shows. And I learned so much from her. (sighs) I wish I remembered her name. I feel really horrible that I don't. She was amazing. She had been a professional opera singer herself in Austria. But, I was the first. I was the first. I mean after that—

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I mean everybody has passed me far (laughs) and beyond. My brother's a lawyer,

my other brother got his masters in this, my sister's a lawyer, and everybody's doing their thang. (laughs) Everybody passed me, and not just my immediate family. But at that point, no one in my extended family had graduated yet. Now my uncle's a doctorate, my father ended up, you know, going back to school and ended up getting his master's and working on his PhD. My mom was the only one that was never able to finish. Her health just got too bad. But, it was like the beginning of that rollercoaster of education in my family. So, it was worth it. I'm glad I stayed. And I don't know if it was because of me? I doubt it, because I'm telling you of my siblings I think I'm pretty smart when it comes to life, and people, and all of that, but they academically outshined me by far (laughs) They were just like (unintelligible)

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"Oh you're cum laude? Well, I'm magna cum laude. I'm summa cum laude." And that's what they were. They were like just—they are just super, super, super smart, talented, successful people. But, I am very proud that I graduated. I am very proud of it. And I know it helped prepare me for what was coming.

Gee: So, after your graduation, what was your game plan as far as getting into the entertainment world, your next steps, moving out of Muncie? What was that for you?

Williams: I was very confused for a slight second. My family was pushing me. My uncle and aunt, who were kind of managing me at the time, were pushing me to LA. I had gone to LA a couple of times. Once, with Ball State, and also doing a play with my uncle. And they really wanted me to go to Los Angeles. I had no

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interest in going to LA. I wanted to be in the city. I was from Chicago, wanted to go to New York. That's what was drawing me. Broadway was drawing me. And against my family's wishes—My parents wanted me to go to Chicago, because it was close. It's safer, in their opinion, than me going to New York City. My uncle and aunt wanted me to go to LA. Nobody was happy with me and my decision to go to New York City. My best friend Beth, who's my roommate, oh boy her father hated me because she decided to quit school and move with me to New York. So, we moved—First we went to Connecticut, because we wanted to find a place to live, get jobs and all that. And Connecticut was close enough by train to do that. And her mother lived there. So, we moved to Connecticut, and I got two full time jobs. Two!

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I was working all the time. Burger King and some department store.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: And I was working and living in this house and miserable, because it was the first time I was away from my family. And her mom, God love her, was very prejudice person. (laughs) Notice, I did not say racist, I said prejudice. She just didn't like anybody that wasn't like her. So, she wasn't always very nice, and she wasn't always nice to my friend either. But, it was perfect because we were able to raise money, find a place, and we moved to first Queens, which was awful! It was awful! It was awful! It was an awful place. Roach-infested, small, stinky, dangerous. And my friend, she was blonde and blue-eyed. They hated her. I was constantly protecting her. I never mentioned this, but I was a fighter growing up. I was very—I mean I fought every single day. I stopped doing it when I (laughs) moved

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to Muncie. But I got—I was glad I had that grit in me when we lived there, because I was constantly protecting her from people because I would stand up to them. I'm like, "You want to touch her, you touch me first, and you won't like what you gone get."

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: And so, they left us alone, but it was dangerous. We weren't there long. Pretty quickly, she got a job right away. She's so amazing. She's just got a great job right away. I—Dirk, who was my boyfriend, not anymore we had broken up—but he decided to come to New York too, and he went to AMDA [American Musical and Dramatic Academy]. I don't remember what that stands for, but it's like a college for theatre people and musical theatre people. And so, he was dating a new girl, and she was awesome and she worked at this restaurant and she got me a job. So, that's how I got my first and last job,

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real job, for many, many years. I didn't do—After I did that job, I started acting. I never went back to a real job until now. Now I substitute teach, because I have a kid and I got to pay bills, because she's my priority now. But that's what I did. I moved to New York. We moved into Manhattan. We got a place, 49th Street. I mean, literally Times Square. We lived on Times Square. It was eight hundred fifty dollars for a box that was about that big (gestures). I mean, there was room enough for a love seat, and that's it.

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: The kitchen and the bathroom were part of the same thing. You just went around a little corner. It was teeny and eight hundred fifty dollars a month. Now it's

probably for one thousand dollars a month. But back then, eight hundred fifty dollars

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was a lot. So, we didn't eat. (laughs) I think I ate one carton of shrimp-fried rice every three days. I ate on that. And I walked to work. And I walked forty-three blocks to work every day. And I was a hostess. I started off as a hostess, and then they really liked me, so I started working during the day, during—The restaurant wasn't open during the day, so I answered the phones, and then I started doing bookkeeping for them, and I ended up bookkeeping for three of the restaurants, and I would hostess at night. And I went out right away, within the first two months, and started auditioning. And I got my first Off-Off-Broadway show, *Two-by-Two*. It was a musical about Noah's Ark. And I remember that audition, standing in that line terrified. I was like, Oh my

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gosh! I'm auditioning! It's New York people! (screams) And I was standing there and I was listening to the auditions, because you could hear them. And I was like, I'm better than that. (both laugh) I can do that. Oh come on! Please!? And I got it. And very soon after that people started coming into the restaurant, because everybody knew what I wanted to do. They knew I was—And everybody was like, "Oh you're so pretty! What do you do?" In New York, everybody, every hostess, or actor, we're all actors trying to get a job. And people started coming in, "*Love Supreme*? Have you heard about Spike Lee's new movie? *Love Supreme*—

Gee: No.

Williams: -*Love Supreme*." That's what they were saying. I was like, "Nah, I don't know nothing about it. What's *Love Supreme*?" They're like, "Here!" And people started bringing me articles about—it was turned into *Mo' Better Blues*, that's what it was called. Multiple people, people I didn't even know, were coming to me saying, "You need to audition for Spike Lee's new movie." I never considered movies.

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I didn't even watch movies. I was movie illiterate. I was theatre. But for years people had been telling me, professional people had been telling me, "You need to move to either New York or LA and do movies. You'd be a better movie actress. And you're a theatre actor, because you're so subtle. You do a lot of work with your face. Your face speaks volumes, and you can't see that on a stage." And I don't know how many people suggested it? And I was like, Why not? I'd seen *School Daze*, I'd seen *She's Gotta Have It*, because he was the only person doing it at the time. I remember being here watching *School Daze* saying, "That was supposed to be me!" (both laugh) "They stole it—That was supposed to be me!"

Do the Right Thing had just come out, and I watched that movie seven times in the theatre. Every time I had a

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day off I would go see that movie, and I studied it. Because I would literally walk down the street practicing what I was going to say to him when I met him. That talking to myself, I knew exactly what I was going to say to him when I met him, because I practiced it over and over again. I practiced the different versions of what he might say to me. So, when this audition came about, it was a general audition. They had been to Chicago, they had been to New York once already, they had been to Los Angeles, and they had not found the girl. They didn't like anyone yet. So, I went to the casting offices, and it turned out that it was a casting office for several different casting directors. I got there at eight in the morning, which is when they said the office opened, and I had no idea who I was going to meet, what was going to happen? And no one—There were casting directors there, but not

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the one for me. So I was like, Ok? I called my boss, because I was supposed to be at work, and I was like, "Hey, Louie I'm at this audition. Is that cool?" He was like, "No worry. We'll cover the phones. You do that." I didn't know how long I was going to be there, so I always have a book with me. Always, because you never know when you might have to wait. Midwest training, right? I sat there, and I started reading. And a casting director would come over. "Who you here for?" I said, "I'm here to see Robi Reed." They're like, "Oh, not here yet. You need anything?" "No, I'm fine. Thank you!" Somebody asked, "You need some water?" "Sure, I'll take some water. Thank you!" And I'm reading, and I'm reading, and people keep coming out looking at me. It's a circular space, and there's offices all around. And they're coming around and they're like peeking at me. Eleven o'clock rolls by, so I've been sitting there since eight, and

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this woman comes over to me. This little, tiny, petite black woman with great big eyes. And she comes over to me, she goes, "Hi, I'm Robi Reed." And I go, "Oh! Robi Reed's a woman?" (both laugh) And she said, "You—Why are you here?" I said, "I want to audition for *Love Supreme*." And she said, "Wow! There's no auditions today. We're doing a cattle call tomorrow. But because of who you are, I'm going to see you right now. When I walked in the door, everybody came over to me and said, 'Give that girl a shot! She is sitting there, she is patient, she is nice! She is someone you need to give a shot.'" So, she asked me what my name is. I said, "It's Cynda Williams," because I had decided to become Cynda Williams. And, so I went in and I signed in Cindy

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(laughs) because I just hadn't gotten used to writing that yet. And I remember her telling me, "Before we even begin this conversation, I need to ask you are you okay with nudity? There is nudity in this movie." And I remember turning cold, because like I said I was very religious, you know. I was like (whispers), "Oh my gosh! I don't know, I don't know, I don't know? Can I make a phone call?" She said, "Sure." So, I called my grandfather. I was like, "Pa-pa," that's what I called him. "I am at a casting office going to audition for a Spike Lee movie, and I don't know what to do because they've told me that there's nudity in this movie and I don't know what to do?" "Are you an actress?" I said, "Yes." "Because do you play other people?"

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I said, "Yes." "So, I don't understand the question? Do people live in this life, and have sex or show their bodies?" I said, "Yes." He goes, "You're playing a person. You're not playing you, you're playing a person. If it's too much don't do it, but give it a shot." I was like, Wow! Not what I expected to hear. So I said, "Okay! I'm fine with that." And that's when I had my first audition. Next day, I came back I had my second audition, and each time I had to sing every time. That first audition with Spike the next day, I had never auditioned for a movie before. I had only done commercial stuff, so I stared at the camera. I was doing all my lines to the camera. He was like, "Eer, stop, stop! Have you ever auditioned for a movie before?" I said, "No." He goes, "Okay, I can tell. Talk to me," (laughs) "Don't talk to the camera. This is not a

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commercial." And at the time I was in a commercial class. He's like, "Don't talk to the camera. Talk to me." And that was the first of six auditions for a month and a half. And every day he would call me, and I realized later that he was creating the character based on me. He would ask me, "What do you think her job is? Who do you think she is?" So, there's a scene in it where I'm working in a record store. That came from me. Everything about this character I created, because he used me that way (laughs) and I didn't even have the job. And I remember at one point getting very frustrated after about six weeks of this. Hearing from him every day, and I was to the point where I just don't care anymore. I was like, "Look, I am not coming in there anymore. I don't want to sing anymore. I don't want to talk anymore. I want to know if I have the job, because if I don't have the job there are other things I can audition for. Please just tell me what's going on."

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And this was after an audition, and I had left and walked all the way home, and he called me back and that's what I said. I was like, "I'm just frustrated Spike. Just

tell me. Do I have it or not?" He said, "Come back. Why'd you leave so quickly?" I'm like, "Because I was done." "No you're not. Come back" Because I had just auditioned with Denzel. And I went back frustrated. I was like, Okay. What now? And I walked in the room and Denzel, he said, "I just wanted to tell you that you have big feet." I was like, "What? I have big feet?" I actually have very small feet. (laughs) I was like, "Okay?" He goes, "I'm just kidding! You got the part!" And so—

Gee: So, before we touch on that experience, one thing you mentioned is that you deciding to be named—called Cynda. Why

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did you have to make that decision?

Williams: There was a Cindy Williams already in Screen Actress Guild. And if I was going to be a part of that guild, and in order to do movies you have to be—you know, lead roles in movies—you have to be a part of Screen Actors Guild, in a union film, which it was because it was for Columbia Pictures. I knew I had to change my name to something. I was never fond of Cindy. It's grown on me as an adult, but when I was a kid I never liked it because people made fun of me. "Cindy Brady, Cindy Brady. It's a white name. You got a white name." And all my—After my cousin Richard and I, all the rest of my cousins they had very Afrocentric names. So I never liked Cindy, but I loved Williams. It meant something to me. Williams meant something, so I knew it was my first name. I didn't know what to change it to. So,

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my sister's name was Monica. My other sister's name was Sodiqa. I was like, Ah, ah, ah. My middle name is Ann. So I got to take the "a" off and put it on there. Cyndica? Ew that sounds weird! (both laugh) And this is all going in my head. I'm not expressing this to anyone, I'm just thinking about it. Cyndica? Cyndica? I said how about Cynda? That's pretty! Cynda! And I haven't told anyone. I go visit a friend of mine in upstate Michigan, and her mother's calling me Cynda. I'm like, This is weird! So I ask my friend, I was like, "Hey Lis, why is your mom calling me Cynda?" She goes, "Oh she's not. It just sounds like that. That's her accent." I was like, "Your mother doesn't have an accent. What are you—

Gee: (laughs)

Williams: —talking about? She's Polish! I mean, now what kind of accent are you talking about? It's not—She's calling me Cynda." She goes, "Well, let's go see." So, we go downstairs, and I say, "Mrs. Bessette, are you calling me Cynda?" And she says, "Well, yes

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I am!" I said, "Well, why?" She said, "Cindy is a cute name. You're not cute. Cynda is a beautiful name. You're beautiful! You're Cynda!" I was like, "Now I know what my name is!" (both laugh)

Gee: So, now you're Cynda Williams—

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: —and you're auditioning for Spike Lee for this movie that went from one title to *Mo' Better Blues*.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: You're about twenty-four at this time and you're in here with Spike Lee, Denzel Washington. Did you have any like "pinch me" moment where you're he— Wesley Snipes is there! How did this make you feel? This being your first big film, two years after you've graduated college.

Williams: Well, first of all, it's actually a year. It was a year, so it was really quick. But you have to remember Spike Lee was, because of *Do*

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the Right Thing—which was just out—becoming a big person, becoming a big name. Wesley wasn't a huge star yet. Denzel wasn't a huge star yet. Denzel had done *Glory*, but it hadn't come out yet. That's what took him to another level. So, we were all newbies. As matter of fact, I had been acting longer than Denzel. Denzel didn't start acting until he was in college, and he was still pretty young. He's older than me, but not by that much. Spike—*She's Gotta Have It* and *School Daze* weren't huge yet. It wasn't a big deal yet. *Do the Right Thing* is what made him, and it had just came out. So, we were all kind of young. Now, they'd been doing it longer then me when it comes to the movies. And there were moments where they were like, "Young kid," to me. But,

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I had no question about my ability to pull this character off. I wasn't intimidated by them at all, because I had been training for this my whole life. And the only "pinch me" moment is I was getting paid to do what I loved to do. And to me I thought I was getting paid a lot of money. I wasn't. (laughs) I found out later unfortunately. I was making scale, the least amount you could make. Which was really hurt me for a long time because I played a lead role in a major studio film for the least amount you could make. So, it was very difficult to move my quote from that point. It hurt me, financially. But I was just happy to be working, doing

something that I loved to do and getting paid for it. For the first time I had money, because the other job was paying for my,

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barely food, and for my place. But I didn't have any money for anything else. So, now I actually have money. I went and I bought my father like three pairs of shoes, maybe more. I bought my brother shoes. I brought my sisters clothes. Bought my mo—I just started—I went crazy. For the first time in my life I was actually able to buy clothes for myself. I had been wearing hand-me-downs my entire life. I always wore hand-me-downs. And I bought myself a leather jacket, and jeans, and shoes. Shoes that weren't from Payless. For the first time, I could actually spend money, and I'm not a big spend-thrift. I still go to Goodwill, you know, because I just grew up having to do that. But that was (singing) awesome! (both laugh) I loved it.

Gee: So with that experience, you're

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coming into a new world, being able to do more for yourself. And when you decided that you wanted to steer away from singing it was because of the singing world.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: What was the movie world like in comparison?

Williams: You know, I can truly say that I don't know? Because I didn't live in it. I acted. I did my job, and I would go home. I didn't participate in the parties. I didn't get to know the people, because the first movie I had some rough experiences, that I'd rather not get into. I write about somewhat—some negative, life-changing experiences on a personal level, not a professional level. And I just didn't want to be a part of that word. Unh-uh. And not because I thought I was better than, or whatever. It just wasn't who I was. It wasn't who I was raised

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to be. So, that's why I loved acting because you didn't have to be a part of that world. If you wanted to be a superstar you did, but all I cared about was acting. I didn't care about the fame. I cared about acting. I've never cared about somebody knowing my name. (unintelligible) I don't care about that. I just care about being able to dive into a character and create someone brand new. That's what brings me joy, And the money! (both laugh) So I can take care of myself and my family, I like that! But the fame part of it, I always dreamed of being a character actress. It took some time for that to happen because of my look. I got the ingénue roles

often. But I didn't care about becoming Halle Berry, what Halle became. I didn't want that. As a matter of fact, I like my anonymity. For the longest time, no one knew I was the girl that was in this movie, the girl that was in

[1:40:00]

that movie. No one knew I was the same person, and I liked that. Because that's why I did it. I did it to create people that were new, and someone could learn something from and get something from. I didn't do it to become famous. So, I didn't hang out. I didn't do that. I didn't live in that world.

Gee: Good! So, you talk about being you. In the nineties, this was an iconic fashion era. People my age are trying to rebuild it.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: How did you use fashion to reflect your personal style and personality? Seeing that you got into the movies, and now this was a time for you to be able to go out and buy new clothes, buy new shoes for yourself.

Williams: I've always been a down-to-earth girl. So, I wasn't at the expensive shops. I wasn't at—I was never a brand name girl. I didn't get the Gucci and the Chanel. I didn't do that. So,

[1:41:00]

I had my own style. I created who I was, and it was all me. And Cynda and Cindy were two totally different people. When I was being an actress I was wearing what they put on me, and often times I would keep those clothes for audition purposes, because my wardrobe was nothing like that. My wardrobe was jeans and t-shirts, and sweaters, and combat boots, and Converse. That was me. And so, I really am not a great person to talk to about fashion, because I've never been a part of the trend. I've never changed my clothes with the season. I still have clothes today from the nineties, from the eighties. I kept everything, and I never pick and choose what I'm going to wear based on what's in. I wear what I want to wear. And I don't care (laughs) what anybody thinks about it. I'm just me.

Gee: Okay,

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so moving forward from that. In 1998, you were in a film called *Relax, It's Just Sex*, and you played Sarina Classer. Tell me a little bit about the role you played, who she was, and how you got yourself prepared for that role.

Williams: *Relax, It's Just Sex* was my first time playing a lesbian character. And it was just

the beginning, because I've played so many. (laughs) For a while there, I became the go to girl to play gay, because oddly, in spite of my prudish ways, I was good at acting. And people believed me when I would do love scenes that—this is believable. This is real. The man—(unintelligible) he's my manager now—Steven Wolfe was producer and owner of that company.

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Great guy. One person that is still in my life, and he's one of my managers now. When he came to me with this, he was like, "I know it's—you're not gay. I know this, but I know you can do this. It's a great script." I read the script. I loved the script. I loved the person. For the first time, I loved the person I was going to play. Most of the time in the characters, I didn't like me. The characters I was playing, I was like, I have to learn to love this character, because I don't like her. This movie I actually liked her. I was like, This is the closest to Cindy that I've ever played, it's just she's gay. And, it was very interesting because by then I'd done a few love scenes with men. And Lori Petty, who was my love interest in that film, she was terrified. She'd never done a love scene before, especially with a girl.

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And so, that was the beginning of me choreographing love scenes in movies. I choreographed it. I said, Okay, let's do this. Are you comfortable with this? Let's do this, let's do that. (unintelligible) Because—and I would tell her, "Just imagine I'm whoever you're in love with. That's what I do. Just imagine that I am him, her, or whoever, because that's what I'm doing when I'm looking at you. I'm imagining that you're,"—whoever I was with at that time. I don't even remember? I've been through a few. (laughs) I think I was married to Arthur at that point. "Imagine that I'm that person, and this will be real." And it was, and it worked out. She didn't ever lose the fear, but she loosened up enough for us to be able to shoot those scenes and get through it. And after it was out and we, you know—

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people would watch it. People would come up and, "You're gay! You're gay!" And I'm like, "(unintelligible) No, no! I'm not gay. I love women. I think women are beautiful, but I prefer men."

Gee: And you had experience with nudity, which you talked to your grandfather about—

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: —so, that helped you become more comfortable with being able to express yourself in that way. But in that time, being gay, especially in the African

American community, was kind of frowned upon at that time.

Williams: Um-hm.

Gee: How did you overcome, with your spirituality and the views at that time, being able to portray that character, and just in your everyday life helping—through that role—helping others be comfortable with their sexuality.

Williams: Well by then, and way before then, I came—for me, personally—came to the conclusion that God loved all people no matter race, or—That's one great thing about being different. If you come to the conclusion

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that God loves you, how could I say that God doesn't love him or her, who just happens to be gay? So, I didn't have those issues at those times. And because I was kind of alienated in my own world and I have a whole lot of friends—And actually, I had quite a few gay friends. It didn't bother me one way or another. No one commented, no one cared. I know for a fact that there are people that didn't like me for it, you know. To this day there are people that don't like me for it. They think I'm a slut, they think I'm a whore, they think I'm all these things. I don't care what they think. I know who I am. I just happened to be an actress that has played certain characters. And I love people. Two of my best friends are a gay female couple. I love them. I don't care. So, it didn't affect me at all in a negative way.

Gee: That's great.

[1:47:00]

Now, spinning off from acting. In 2005, you became a certified hypnotherapist.

Williams: Um-hm!

Gee: What was the purpose in doing that? What drove you to accomplish that?

Williams: Well, my whole life I had always been someone that people came to when they had a problem, when they had issues. So, I have—I think that's the grandfather in me, because he was a counselor. I have that instinctually—I have the ability to help people. Most often by just listening. I find the best therapists are the ones that listen to you and you fix your problems. They just give you a safe space to talk. Right? People started calling me the set shrink, because every time someone would have an issue, there would be a knock on my trailer and they would come to me and talk to me. I did a movie

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that had a very crazy cast and crew. (laughs) Nuts! Hilarious, great people, but they were (unintelligible) cuckoo! And (laughs) everybody kept coming to me with all the fights, and all the end fights, and all the—Everybody kept coming to me. And I was overwhelmed and it drained me. And it had been building up to this point, because I knew how to help people, but I didn't know how to protect myself. And that was the final straw for me when I did this film. I was so worn out by the experience, that I didn't even go to the cast party, because I didn't want to see the people again. The producer called me, but I said, I can't go. I can't face them again. I feel like I am a husk. I feel like my blood has been drained.

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I have to recuperate. And I remember lying there thinking, Okay. And I talked to my—called my dad, because my dad had just finished up—he became a counselor. And I was like, "Daddy, what do I do, because I don't want to walk away from my career, but I need to learn how to help people in such a way so that I have skills. I'm not just going off instinct on how to help people. But I have skills and I can protect myself." And he was like, "I don't know? I don't know what kind of program? Because it would take you away from your career. Do you want to be a therapist?" I said, "No, I don't! I just want to be able to help those people that come to me. I'm not trying to start a new career. I love what I do." I promise you within a day, my husband at the time said, "You know, I was thinking about going to this school HMI [Hypnosis Motivation Institute]." Because he had an interest

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in becoming a therapist, because his father was a child psychiatrist. And he loved that. He read books about it all the time. I read books about it all the time. I'd had therapy and had help. He's like, "I met this guy named Todd Sandman." I was like, "Hold up! Who!?" He said, "His name is Todd Sandman and he runs admissions in this school called Hypnosis Motivation Institute in Tarzana, California, and I'm thinking about going there but I don't know how I could do it?" I said, "Back up! Todd Sandman? I know a Todd Sandman. I went to Ball State University with a Todd Sandman. He was one of my best and only friends that I maintained, but I haven't seen him for years. I wonder could it be the same guy?" He's like, "I don't know? Do you want the information?" I said, "Yes, because I need to get into a school." And it was a one year program. One week is teaching you how

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to hypnotize people. The rest of it is teaching you how to be a therapist for vocational/advocational things, which is the kind of stuff I would do when people want. Although, those always open up deeper, deeper things. So, sure enough it

was Todd Sandman. I think he graduated a year before me from Ball State theatre program. And he had gone off—he got his masters somewhere in Seattle I think? And he ended up becoming—you know, taking a step away from acting and that world for a while, and going to HMI, becoming a hypnotherapist. And they loved him so much he continued working, and he became in charge of their admissions. So, he was like, "You're in! Come on, let's fix it!" And it was great to reconnect with him! He eventually came back to Muncie; was over the Civic Theatre for a long time. Now he's moved back to California. He's in San Diego getting married.

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He's getting married, I think here? At the Civic, they're going to get married. He and Robert. But anyway, it was life changing. At the time, I was very unhappy in a lot of different ways: in my marriage. It taught me about myself. I started understanding my patterns. I started understanding myself. I started understanding why I made the choices I made, and how to make better choices. I still stuck into some stuff I needed to get out of because of my religious background, but it helped me tremendously. It helped me be able to cope with life, and it taught me how to help people. And I became certified. I could work as a hypnotherapist, and I considered doing

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it for actors. Being a hypnotherapist for actors. People that have stuttering problems. People that have stage fright. People—any issues that actors had, I thought I could incorporate. I could coach them, do—you know, coach them for acting, because I'm a very good teacher. And, also that—But, as soon as I made that decision, I started working all the time. Started getting jobs as an actress, and it took me away from it. But, from then on I was always able to use the skills that I learned that year in my own life and in helping others.

Gee: So, you've talked about theatre helping you heal, overcome your struggles growing up. Talked about your friends and family coming to you to help them heal. What is your end goal? What do your memories serve for you in this healing process?

Williams: Well when I was a child I knew wanted to act. I knew I wanted to sing. But I also knew I wanted to write. And I wanted

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to inspire. And I wanted to serve. I never knew what I was going to write? I never knew what it was going to be about? I didn't know if it was going to be a novel, or whatever? But I knew whatever I wrote would be—the purpose would be to help people somehow. Give people hope. It was before my daughter was born. My daughter is almost sixteen, so maybe eighteen years ago, I woke up out of a dream

and I had a vision of where my life was supposed to go. And in this vision, I saw myself standing in front of a large crowd. And there was a screen behind me. And there was—I had just finished watching a short film that I was in that was the subject matter that I was going to speak to the crowd about. And there was back—in the back, people were at a table where I had books, and there was a table with music. And in it, I realized that I had done all of these things,

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and they all were cohesive, and they were all about helping people. I didn't know what or how—I didn't know if it had to do with my acting. It had to do with—But the acting and all that was always a platform for me to get in front of people, or talk to people and help them. I'm good at talking to people, like my grandfather. So, I didn't know what it was going to be about. My daughter turned five. Before that she was with me all the time. Every movie. Every movie. But, then she wanted normalcy. She didn't get that for a while, but she told me, "Mommy please don't leave me anymore." So, I decided to take a step away from my career and raise my daughter. I thought that was very important. I didn't want nannies raising her. I wanted to raise her. So, when I came back to the Midwest—I decided to come back to the Midwest. It was right after the

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Great—what do they call it? Wasn't the Depression—

Gee: Recession.

Williams: —Recession. The Great Recession! Where I thank God I allowed God to lead me, because I almost bought a house under that. And I was told very clearly, Unh-uh! Don't you do it! Don't you do it! And I didn't know why, because it seemed like such a great deal, but I didn't do it. And I was having issues with my marriage, and I decided to come back. The family members that I had that lived there, we all got this gut feeling to leave LA at the same time. My brother moved away to Texas and sold his bungalow for a huge sum of money and bought this great big, massively-sprawling mansion in Texas and became a lawyer there, and his wife is a nurse and they're living there raising their family. All my family moved away. My cousin Anissa came back; she was actually back in Muncie. She worked at Ball State for a while. Now she's—

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her husband is a college football coach, so they change jobs all the time, but started here. He was a coach here at Ball State. All my family left. And I was like, There's nothing here for me. My daughter's an only child, and she doesn't have a tribe. She needs a tribe to raise her. Not just he and I. She needs a tribe, because she's hot! She's a hot mess! And she needs multiple voices teaching her, and

leading her and guiding her. So, that's why I came back. After moves here and there—because I actually—we went to Singapore for a couple of years. When I came back, we ended up—it was just she and I. Her dad stayed in Singapore to continue teaching as a professor there. And I started hearing this loud, obnoxious voice saying, “Write,

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write, write, write, write”. Just like that. Nothing else. Write! And it drove me nuts. I was scared. Even though I knew I’d always wanted to, I was afraid to write because I knew it was going to hurt when I started rehashing things. Because I knew what it was—It was going to be about me. Because at first, I tried to—I was like, I’m going to write this book called *Pink Panty Confessions*. And it’s going to be other people confessing. It’s going to be like *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, and other people are going to write and tell their stories. And nobody wanted to do that. So, I knew I had to do it. If I wanted people to open up and heal through confessions, I was going to have to do it first. So, I started writing a blog, then I finally wrote a book, and it’s been out for about a year. And had these things called Pink Panty parties. And I go around—I thought it was going to be just women from the ages of eighteen to forty-five, and no it’s not.

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I have elderly, white, black, every—Teenagers. All different—It’s wide open to people that are reading the book, even with a title like *Pink Panty Confessions*. And because so many people would assume, especially the Bible Belt, that it’s erotica. And then they find out that it’s not. But those people that read my blog knew what it was, because the blog was called that. And so now I am—That is my focus, and I am working with Catherine Gardner and (sighs) I’m not sure of the name? I’m completely blanking on her name. There’s a woman here that’s from the—I don’t know if it’s tcomm, or whatever—but she’s directing the film and producing the film, a professor here at Ball State. Catherine is creative writing. She wrote the script. And we’re making a movie. And William Lee,

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and his daughter, and his aunt, we’re all in it and it is a beautiful film. We’re shooting it at the end of April, and that I know is the first film that I’m going to be able to show when I’m speaking to my people, and I’m selling my book, and I’m walking on the music that’s inspired by the stories in the book. So, it’s happening.

Gee: You’ve had a fantastic story. Before we close this interview, is there anything that I haven’t asked you about, or any last-minute advice that you would give to anyone pursuing their dreams and looking towards that next step after Ball State?

Williams: Well, the only thing I didn’t talk about very much was my daughter, Sophia

Plummer, and she is the joy. She is pure joy for me. Yes, she's a teenager, and I'm going through it. But that was a great decision. I didn't think I could have children,

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and had her. And the relationships that I've had in my life have been challenging, but have made me grow. And helped me understand who I want, and now I've been given that. I would say as advice to people, is to follow your passion and your joy. Whatever that is. Maybe your joy is family. Your job might be the Post Office. That's okay. Because I think people confuse—and they're like, "Okay well, that means I got to—If I'm going to follow my joy and my passion, that means I'm going to do something and not be practical. I'm scared!" Your joy, whatever it is that brings you joy, that's what you do. I really

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believe that, and you don't give up on that. As hard as life can be, and life is hard for everybody. There is nobody exempt from it. From the richest to the poorest; from the blackest to the whitest. We are all going to be faced with life challenges. If you love it, don't give up on it. That's what I would say.

Gee: Thank you for that advice. And on behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project, I'd love to thank you for your participation.

Williams: Thanks!

[2:02:35]

End of interview

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Ball State University Oral Histories

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Gee: Hello, my name is Marquice Gee. Today is Tuesday, April 4, 2017, and I'm interviewing Muriel Weeden on Ball State's campus as part of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project. Hi Ms. Weeden! How are you today?

Weeden: Hello, I'm doing very well.

Gee: First, if I could get you to state when and where you were born.

Weeden: I was born in Mound City, Illinois, July 19, 1941. That's right above the Mason-Dixon Line.

Gee: And what were the names of your parents?

Weeden: Dixon Coleman Coatie and Georgia Mason Coatie.

Gee: And how many siblings did you have?

Weeden: I had four brothers and three sisters.

Gee: So that's a total of eight—

Weeden: Eight of us.

Gee: —including you right?

Weeden: Yes.

Gee: Okay! So,

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what was it like to grow up with that many, not just children, but that many people in one house?

Weeden: Well, (laughs) actually it was great, but it was different, because most of the time growing up—you know after we left Illinois— my sisters lived with an aunt, and my oldest brother stayed in Illinois, because he didn't want to leave his friends at his school. And, part of the time, my youngest brother lived with my parents, and then my other brother and I lived with my aunt. So, it really wasn't all of us together at the same time, most of the time.

Gee: So, what was the reason for you and your siblings being—living in separate households?

Weeden: Well, when I was four,

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my aunt, who lived in Muncie, came to Illinois and brought my sisters and my brother—that is just a year or so older than I am—and myself, brought us back to Muncie. And then, my baby brother, Bob, had just been born. And my parents then moved to Muncie with Bob. But there really wasn't any place that we could live, because they would not rent houses to people with children—that many children. So, when my parents came—at one point my parents, my baby brother, my brother George, who was older than myself, and I, we lived with an

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uncle. And then after that, George and I went back to live with the aunt and my sisters. And my mother and father, and my baby brother actually lived in what was a—had been a chicken coop, because they had to go in it—it was like a big shed—and to go in and clean it out real good, and that's where they lived for a while, because no one would actually rent a house to people with that many children. My aunt was a—what they called a domestic. She worked for a family, out here on Briar Road, at the time. And my uncle was a barber, and he had a barbershop. And so, my sisters remained in the house with them.

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And, when my parents finally were able to get a house of their own, my brother George, and Bob and I lived with my parents. But, my siblings were quite a bit older than we were. So, they didn't want to change schools, or they were about ready to move out on their own, so they didn't live with us.

Gee: So, you all lived in separate households, because there weren't landlords at the time who wanted to rent to families who had that many children. And you moved to Muncie from Illinois at such a young age; at the age of four. How—

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: —did it affect you growing up not living with your mom and your dad?

Weeden: Uum, not at all, because I saw them. And then, when I live—I think I lived with them when it was crucial, because

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when they moved here and lived with my dad's brother and his wife, then I lived with them. And that was preschool. We didn't have preschool, but I would have been preschool age, because my parents moved here when I was four, also. And then when I was five, I was still living with them, went to the old Garfield Elementary School, which is no longer there. But, I went to kindergarten, and that sparked my love for school. I don't remember who the teacher was? I don't remember her name? I know it was a lady. But, I just—I loved it. And, then they had half-day kindergarten. So, you either went in the morning or the afternoon. And I went in the morning, and I remember

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that first day crying because my mom wouldn't let me go back in the afternoon. And I said, "Well, she said I'll see you later." (both laugh) And my mom said, "Well, yes. But she means tomorrow." So, I just—it was almost the same as if I lived with them all the time because we saw them regularly.

Gee: That's great. With so many siblings, what are some of your more fonder memories growing up with as many siblings as you have?

Weeden: There's always somebody around to talk to, to play with. Just to be around. And because I was the youngest girl, there was always somebody around to do the work. (laughs) To do the dishes or to clean.

Gee: What values did

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Your parents try to instill in you growing up?

Weeden: One of the most important things that they taught us was to help other people. Not to judge people by their circumstances, or by their outward appearance. We were

always feeding people. We found out that our house had been marked by what they called hobos, because we lived near a railroad track when we finally got a house of our own. And, they would jump off the train and—because it was about two blocks from our house—they would jump off the train and come to our house because they knew that we would feed them. And, my dad was a pastor, and my mom, before she married, had been a—well she drove

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for an evangelist and she traveled. So, we always had people from the church at our house. It was like, just a big family. And so, they taught us just to accept people as they were, not to make judgments based upon people, and to be available to help in whatever way we could. And so, I just kind of grew up doing that, and then, expecting everybody to do the same thing. And I found out that wasn't the way it worked, because a lot of people did not want to help other people. They would, you know, say, "Well, I got mine. They can get theirs." But, I'm grateful that my parents taught us to be available to help other people.

Gee: What were some of your initial reactions

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when you moved to Muncie?

Weeden: I don't know that I—I mean it was just some place that we moved. It didn't have any real effect on me, because Mound City, it was not a city. It was just a little country place. I don't know how many people lived there? But it seems like everybody that I met—there were a lot of people that moved to Muncie from that area, and they just said, Southern Illinois. And, it just seems like everybody that lived there, we knew them. It was just a little small place. It was just moving from one country place to another little country place.

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Muncie didn't seem that big at that—it wasn't that big. Still not. But, it's home.

Gee: From your youth, do you have any memories of stereotypes that you saw, or witnessed, against African Americans in like popular culture or advertising? Anything like that that stood out to you?

Weeden: Growing up in Muncie, I didn't—you didn't see it. I mean, there was no advertising or advertisements that had African Americans in them. There were no role models—As a matter of fact, I never had a person of color as a teacher until I was a

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student at Ball State and I was twenty-nine years old. I never had a teacher in—from elementary through high school, never had a teacher that was a person of color. I remember when the first African American teacher was hired in Muncie. She lived like down the next block from us. So, I think the stereotyping basically was we were invisible. There was nothing that you could look at and say, Wow that looks like me! Or, I could do that! Because there was just nothing.

Gee: I want to come back to that thought. But, I want to trace back to—progressing your childhood, you attended Muncie Central High School.

Weeden: Um-hm. Um-hm.

Gee: What was your academic and social life

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like in Muncie?

Weeden: Academics, that was good. We were on track, because my parents made certain that we were. But, there was no encouragement from the school to do good in anything. No one ever mentioned to me that I needed to take the SAT. No one ever talked to me about applying for college or going to college. Or, What do you want to be when you graduate? There was none of that. I don't remember—I don't even think they had counselors. We had, what they called, deans. And the deans were basically, I guess

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they're for discipline. I don't know? I don't think I ever talked to them. At one point, we had advisors, and so the advisor's job was to talk to us about after high school and preparing for whatever. My advisor, I remember, was my senior English teacher. His name was Frank Stafford. I just—I loved him. He was an excellent teacher, and I loved English. And I remember saying to him one day that when I graduated I wanted to go to college and become an English teacher. And he says, "Oh no Muriel! You don't want to do that. Oh, that's the worst thing you could want to be." And he just told me how bad that was, and I shouldn't try to do that. So, the next time I thought about and I said to him, "You know, I think I would like to be a psychologist."

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He said, "Oh no! Oh my God! Why would you want to—I don't think you want to do that? That's not something that you would want to do." So it was—everything that I was interested in, I was—it was like being discouraged from trying to achieve anything that—It was like that was not in our—you know, Stay in your lane. That's not in your lane. There was no one, no one in the school that

encouraged any kind of doing anything academically. I had a teacher, senior class. I think it was Civics. I remember her vividly,

[15:00]

because her name was Frances O'Hara. And she hated me, and she made the classes difficult as she could. And I remember everyday sitting in the hall listening at the doorway while she taught the class, because she always found a reason to send me out. She would say that I was late, or that my feet were sticking out in the aisle. Just anything. And I have my report card at home now, the report card when I had her. And she had given me a nice big, fat, red D. And I asked her why I got a D? Because I alw—even though I sat in the hallway—I always did well in class and I made good grades in there. And I said, "Why did I get a D?" And she said, "Because, I just don't like you!"

[16:00]

And she could do that. And she did it. And she got away with it. So, academics I would say that it was my parents that made sure I stayed on track, despite what anyone else did or said. Socially we had a lot of fun. But it was if you went in the cafeteria, the African American students were on one side, and the other students were on the other side. No one made us do that, but I mean that's just the way we did. Socially I didn't do a lot as far as going out and that, because I wasn't allowed to. My parents were very strict. My dad was a pastor. It was the Church of God in Christ. I don't know if you're familiar with them or not, but

[17:00]

Pentecostal and very strict. We had church just about every night; well we did every night of the week. And sometimes three times on Sundays. So, that was our social life. That was all we did basically.

Gee: So, Muncie Central, you said that you had an advisor that you would tell, you know, this person the things that you thought you might want to do with—

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: —your future. As a part of the education field, having been a part of that as your career and having been a counselor, what would you say now to instructors, advisors that say those same things to students now?

Weeden: To encourage students to be the best of whatever they want to be, because if it's what they want, they will really work towards it. As a counselor, that was one of the things that I did. I never

[18:00]

told the student that they couldn't do something, or that they shouldn't do it. And I found a lot of the other counselors—their students would come to me because they would be very discouraged. There were students who wanted to apply to Ball State, and counselors would say, "Oh, you'll never get in Ball State. Why don't you try for Ivy Tech instead?" I would say to them, "If you want to go to Ball State, you apply to Ball State and let Ball State make the decision whether or not you will get in. Or any other school." I think that students should be encouraged. As a matter of fact, the reason that I wanted to be in the educational system was I was an adult and I had children,

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but I worked with the youth at our church, and many of them were in high school. And they would come, and I would hear them talking. And they were being told the same things that I was when I was in high school. And just to realize that the same thing was being done to them that had been done to me, I thought, "I want to be in the educational system so that I can encourage these kids to try to do whatever it is they want to do." I had a student who said she wanted to be an RN [registered nurse], and when she went to the counselor and talked they said, "No. Well, I think you would make a nice nurses aid." Whatever that they wanted to be, they were always told that they should try for something a little lower. And I just—I was appalled

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that that was still being done to kids. All those years later, still the same thing going on.

Gee: And with the situation with your teacher, Frances O'Hara, how did that make you feel for her to, you know, call you out, try to pick on you every day, and then blatantly to your face tell you she dislikes you? How did that make you feel, and how did you try to handle that situation?

Weeden: Well, back in that time, the teachers were in charge. They were in control. And with my parents, the teacher was right, so you didn't argue with them. But, I knew that—Well my feeling was, You don't like me? That's your problem. Because my dad always told me, "Your job is to learn. They already know. They have the degree. So, your job is to learn." So, you know,

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don't argue with them. You don't talk back. But, you learn all that you can. So, when she said, "I just don't like you," I thought to myself, I don't like you either. But I knew I better not say it. So, I just looked at her. I didn't make any response to her at all. I just looked at her, and I knew that that was a one-semester class. And when that semester was over, I didn't have to deal with her again. So, I just

let it pass. When I took my report card home, I didn't tell my parents what she said, but they knew how she had behaved the whole semester that I was in there. So, it didn't really—it bothered me enough that I ha—I'm seventy-five years old, and I have not forgotten. So, I can't say that it didn't

[22:00]

bother me at all, because obviously it did. But, it did not make me feel like any less of a person. It didn't make me think that I was stupid or anything. And then, my dad was like—everyday he'd be like, "What did you learn?" You had to learn something everyday, and he always said, "You're smart because you're my child." Those kinds of things that I was told all the time. So, it didn't really matter what she said.

Gee: And going back to you growing up in Muncie, and you know, going through your day to day. You said your uncle had a barbershop, —

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: —the uncle that you moved in with. What were black businesses like in Muncie at that time, and what did they do for the community?

Weeden: Well,

[23:00]

most of them were small home things. His barbershop was in their house. There was a large front room, and that's where he had his barber chair, and the family lived in the rest of the house. There were—I don't really know about a lot of the businesses? I know there were beauty shops, taverns I heard of. There was, like, the little clubs. I never went to any of those, so I really—I just know that whenever I wanted to get my—If my mother wasn't available to wash my hair, whatever, it was someone doing it in their house. They, at that time, they didn't really have—I won't say real businesses, they had business—they just didn't

[24:00]

have a lot of the places. We had—there were two African American doctors. Doctor Smith and Doctor Braden. And everybody said Doctor Braden was afraid of blood, so (laughs) he was—but his office, I think was—I think that was in his house, part of it. And then Doctor Smith had an office on the corner of Kirby and Madison. And, mostly African Americans or—when I was growing up, at one point they called us colored, and then I've been black, because they went through all the different phases to get to African American. But, we went to our doctor, and it was just—Doctor Smith was the doctor.

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I was trying to think—there might have been—Oh, yes! There was a restaurant on Kirby Avenue that—oh! —they had the best food. I can't think of the man's name now. Oh, his name was Roach, and it was called Roach's Cafe. And that was the only restaurant that I can think of when I was young. Yeah.

Gee: Now, was Roach his real name? Or was this just a nickname?

Weeden: No that was his last name.

Gee: His last name!

Weeden: Uh-huh. Roach.

Gee: Do you remember his first name by chance?

Weeden: I don't. It was different, like Am-? Ama? No I, no I don't know—

Gee: (laughs)

Weeden: —I don't remember. Because we just called him Mr. Roach.

Gee: (laughs)

[26:00]

Weeden: But he had the best food. He had a nice restaurant right on Kirby; I think it was on Kirby and Pershing Drive?

Gee: Okay, and transitioning. After high school, you went to the Indiana Business College and received a Junior Secretarial Certification?

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: What exactly is that certification, and why did you choose to go this route after high school?

Weeden: The certification is just—actually is not really that. It's a certificate they give you stating that you have completed—I think it was a nine-month program—accounting and bookkeeping, that kind of thing, along with shorthand. (laughs) I took that. But, the reason I went to Indiana

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Business College, was my parents had—my mother had told me that they could

send me to Ball State, but they could not send me out of town to school or anything because they could not pay that much. They could pay for me to go to Ball State. And I didn't want to go to Ball State. I wanted to go out of town. I wanted to go someplace and live in a dorm. So, I didn't go to Ball State, and when school started I w—my mother was a nurse and she worked out at Ball Memorial, and I was taking her to work one day and it just happened to be the first day of school out here. And I saw all the students going in and out the Administration Building and the Student Center. And I just started crying

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because they were in school and I wasn't, and I just—I wanted to go to school. So, my mother allowed me to go to Indiana Business College, and I took that program. But, that's the reason I went, because I didn't want to go to Ball State. And I actually wound up years later going to Ball State.

Gee: Okay, before we move forward, if I could ask you to fix your jacket so the microphone is flipped out. Sorry. Yeah, there we go. That's fine. And speaking of waiting to go to Ball State, it was actually a ten-year gap between going to the Indiana Business College and coming to Ball State. What was the reason for taking such a long hiatus between the schools?

Weeden: Well, I got married. Two times. (laughs) I adopted a child,

[29:00]

and then a few years later I had a child. Married twice. Divorced twice. Just kind of not knowing what I was doing with my life. Didn't know what I wanted to do. The kids would say, "Trying to find myself." I did not want to be a teacher. That was one of the things—I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I had decided I did not want to be a teacher. I had worked—I had always worked, you know, I always had a job doing something.

Gee: Um-hm.

Weeden: But, I had gotten to the place where, at one point I was working like three jobs at a time,

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and I had two kids. And that was just too much. So, I had applied for welfare. And, there was a caseworker who had just—apparently, he had just graduated and was new, because he really worked. If it had not been for him, it probably would have been even longer before I went to school. But, he happened to check my scores on the test that I took for—I don't even remember what it was for? But it was—it happened to be the same test that the caseworkers had to take for

employment. And he asked me why I wasn't in school? And he said, "You should be at Ball State, because your,"—he said my test scores

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were so high. Well, no one had ever told me what my test scores were, so he started pushing me towards going to Ball State and just helped me with what I— No one had ever told me what I needed to do to—I actually, when I came by and saw the kids going, I thought I could just go into the Administration Building and sign—fill out a form or something and pick my classes, and I'd be in Ball State. But he told me that I needed to take the SAT, and he found out when and where it was given. Made arrangements for me to take the test, and just helped me with everything that I needed to do. So, that's why it was so long. I was just struggling trying to live between all the mistakes that I was

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making.

Gee: Do you remember, by chance, the caseworkers name?

Weeden: No! And I should have, because I remember all those people that were negative. But, I don't. I just know that he was new, and he had just graduated, and was really interested in helping people. I mean, that was—he did that with a passion. And, I think he left here and was transferred to Allen County, up in Fort Wayne.

Gee: So, you said that in this time, you had kind of decided that you didn't want to be a teacher. And then you came to Ball State and you graduated with a major in Elementary Education and a minor for the Teacher of Disadvantaged. So, how did you get back on the teaching track?

Weeden: Because that was the only—there

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was a teacher shortage at that time, in the United States. And so, they were giving money to people who wanted to be teachers. So, that was the only way I could get money to come to school. And that was to say I wanted to be a teacher.

Gee: And, if you could go into a little bit, explaining your minor: Teacher of Disadvantaged. What exactly is that?

Weeden: Yeah, they stopped that. I don't know how long they had it? But it was new. They started it, and I was in one of the first groups to be that. It was like trying to fight the kids who were in poverty in disadvantaged areas. Muncie did not really have real disadvantage, but they—I had to do like student teaching in an area like one

of those schools that had

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the largest number of low-income students. That's what they called disadvantaged. And had to—I did my student teaching—The school where I did my student teaching is—I don't know if they even, if it's even still there. I know it's not a school anymore. But, it was on—it's in the part of Muncie that's called Shedtoun. It was basically low-income Caucasians. And the most—a lot of them had come from like Kentucky. It was very prejudiced. That was where—that school was where I had to do my student teaching. I was the only person of color in the school.

[35:00]

But I found that—I just, I loved it. I loved working with the people. I didn't have any problems, basically. I didn't have problems. And they were disadvantaged, probably the most disadvantaged area in Muncie. And I remember the first day, I went to the school. I went to the teacher's classroom, and the door was shut. And so, I was looking through the window of the door, and there was this one little girl who had pulled her—well I didn't know she had pulled it—but, her desk, she was all the way in the back of the room by herself. And the teacher was up teaching, and I was at the door so she, “Come on in! Come on in!” So, I opened the door and I went in,

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and the teacher told the class who I was. And when she said that I was a student teacher, and told me to just have a seat. So, I sat down in the back of the room, and I noticed when I sit down, this kid took her desk and moved it back up and joined the rest of the class, and never removed herself from the class again. So, the goal was to learn how to teach students who don't have what they need, whose—they're not going to get it when they go home. And they may not have the food. They may not have the clothing. But, find a way to make sure they get the education that they need. And I think now, that would probably transfer

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to most of our schools in Muncie. There's a big problem with disadvantaged students.

Gee: Did you ever ask, or find out the reason why, the little girl was either sitting in the back of the classroom, or why she chose to move when you came into the classroom?

Weeden: The teacher said she removed herself from the class, and she said to me, “Well,

she's not going to stay there. She won't sit with the class. She doesn't talk. She doesn't participate." She said she would move herself back again. So, the teacher had not put her back there. I don't know why she had chosen? But for whatever reason, she just had chosen not to be a part of the class. But, the

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day that I got there she just moved up with the class, and she stayed with the class. And it was a really interesting class. I'm fortunate in that I have loved every job that I've had. So, even though I didn't want to be a teacher, I loved it. Yeah.

Gee: So, were there any other obstacles, or anything you faced while student teaching or being in Sheddton? Or anything?

Weeden: The—I didn't really exp—I didn't expect any problems. But the teacher did. And so, it's like, "Oh, we have this colored person here, and I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm afraid that the parents are going to be upset, because

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you're working with their children." And I'm like, "Why? Why would they be upset that I'm working with their children?" "Well, because you're colored." And I was like, "Um-hm, okay?" So, she had gone to the principal, because she was just so concerned, and she was worried that there would be a problem once the students went home and told their parents that they had a student teacher who was colored. I didn't think that that was much a problem for the students as the teacher thought, because I'm thinking they will go home and they will say, "We got a new student teacher today." I wasn't expecting that they would go home and say, "Oh, gosh. We got a new student teacher today, and she's colored." I mean, the kids, they don't think like that unless somebody's

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telling them to. So, she was part of my problem. The biggest problem. And every day she was saying, "You let me know if you have any problems. If anybody says anything." I'm like, "Okay." So, one day at lunch, this little boy from my class—because I would go down to the lunchroom and sit at the table with the kids; one day a week I would go down. And, this particular day I was sitting at the table with some of our students, and this little boy, one of our students, wanted me to arm wrestle. And I said, "No, that's not appropriate. I'm not going to do that." And he kept trying to insist that I arm wrestle him, and I said, "No!" And so, then he says, "Well, I don't care, because nobody wants to wrestle a 'n-word' anyway!"

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And all the kids went, “Gasp!” They were just shocked. So, he got the lesson on what that word means. I didn’t get angry or anything, because I knew he really didn’t know the meaning of the word. He’s heard someone use it inappropriately. So, I gave him the lesson about what the word means, and I said, “So, I am not. You are not, but you just don’t know any better. But you could be.” So, that was the end of it for me, because he was—I knew that he didn’t mean anything by it, he just wanted the attention. And he was sorry that he had said it, so that was the end of it for me. But, some of the kids went and told the teacher, and of course the teacher came because I didn’t tell her and she was upset. And so, she had to go tell the principal and really

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make a big deal out of it, you know. But, that never happened again. And then, for my project I was having the class—we were studying, I think it was Indiana history. And so, I said that I had told her what we were going to do. So the last day, for our finale, we were going to cook foods that they would have had years ago, and I was going to invite this reporter called Dick Greene from the—it was called the Muncie Star then. I was going to invite him to come in, because he was very well known, and he did the history—he studied history of Indiana and he wrote about it. I had told her I was going to invite him. She said,

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“Oh, he’s too busy! You’ll never get him to come!” I said, “Well, yes! He’s coming!” And she said, “Oh, he is too busy. He won’t come. What else are you doing?” I said, “Well, I’m going to invite all the parents to come and hear the presentation, and then the kids are going to serve them their food.” And she said, “Oh, we cannot get parents to come. These parents will not come to school. No matter what’s going on, we cannot get them to come. So, for that reason I’m giving you a B for your grade, because it’s a good idea, but it’s not going to happen. It’s not going to work.” So, that day came. The place was packed. All the parents came. Dick Greene came. And she apologized. She said, “Oh, I’m so sorry.

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I never thought he would come.” But what she didn’t know was that I knew him. We were friends. His wife had been my second-grade teacher at the old Washington School, and we had kept in touch all those years. And I had worked at the Muncie Star—in the Evening Press—in the classified department. And so, he worked there in the news department. So, I saw him like every day. And I knew that—He told me, “If there’s ever anything I can do to help you, just let me know and I’ll do it.” So, I knew he was coming even though she insisted that he wasn’t. But, it was—I mean just things like that. People expecting that I could accomplish less than—

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I just felt like, had I looked like her, she would have believed what I said. But, I didn't. And so, she thought that I could not deliver on what I said I would. So, things like that—Even at Ball State there was a lot of discrimination going on. I didn't have a problem in undergrad. But, in grad school one of my professors—and I wish, I have tried so hard to remember his name, but I cannot. But, he had a wife who taught at Ball State as well. And, he did like everything he could—He was so very negative,

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rude, and disrespectful. And he told me once, "I would never recommend you to be a counselor." And I said, "And I would never ask you to." But, he was just so rude. And, he taught a class that was required. It was like Research. And, he was the only one who taught the class during the school year. So, I took the class. I got—He would not help me. He was always saying something rude. He would not approve any subject—Every topic that I picked to do my research on, "No! That's—No! That's not a problem! NO!" I mean, he turned everything down without telling me why.

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And when I would ask him, it would be like that I was just stupid or something. And so, I had to go to another professor in the department, and ask, "What am I doing wrong?" He said, "What are your topics?" So, I showed him all the different topics that I had chosen. And he was like, "Oh, well that's good! Oh boy, that's a good one! That's good! I don't know why he's turning these down, because this is exactly what you're supposed to be doing?" But, he turned everything down, so I dropped his class. And, someone told me, "Take the class in the summer, because that's the only time he doesn't teach it." So, I signed up for the class. I was going to take it in the summer. Get it out of the way. And of course, not enough people signed up, so the class was dropped and I wound up having to take him again and have him. So, I just put up with him.

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But, I wrote a letter to the president of Ball State University, and sent a copy to the department chair, and I sent a copy to the professor as well. And I had a meeting with the president at that time, and he asked me why didn't I wait. I said, "Most people would have waited until they had graduated, but because it's not for me. It's for the people who will come after me and may get this man in class. No one should have to put up with that kind of behavior from a professor." I just have experienced things like that all along growing up in Muncie. It's like, three people of color, three together,

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that was a crowd. And you could be arrested for standing on the corner just talking. I mean they could—because you might be planning to riot or something. I don't know what they would think, but they did things like that.

Gee: And did that make you feel intimidated, or even scared sometimes to go out or do anything?

Weeden: No. I've never, never felt intimidated. Never was afraid. And, I give a lot of credit to my dad, because he always made us feel like we could do anything that someone else could do. If they could do it, that we could do it better.

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So, we were never taught to be afraid. Matter of fact, my dad—my mom would get on my dad because he actually taught us to fight. (laughs) And she said, "You're supposed to be teaching peace!" But, it's like, I could never come home without my brother from school, because if my dad said, "Where's George?" I better say he's outside the door, or something. Could never say, "He got in a fight." Because if he got in a fight, then I better be there, you know. If one of us had a fight, we all had a fight. Not they we jumped in and jumped on anybody, but we were there to make sure that they were not going to be jumped by somebody

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else. So, I was never afraid. No.

Gee: And just to backtrack and clarify. The teacher that heavily doubted you while you were teaching at Shedtown, do you remember her name?

Weeden: No, no I don't. She died. I remember that. I saw it in the newspaper. I don't remember the principal's name. I just remember certain incidents and particular kids. Matter of fact, the little boy that called me the n-word, I remember later, going to church with him. He invited me. Asked me to come to his church, and they were having a revival. So, I went to church with him one night. Yeah, I remember that. The church was on 12th Street.

Gee: Now, being at Ball State,

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we actually got to interview your youngest brother, Bob Coatie.

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: Were you guys at Ball State at the same time?

Weeden: We were, but he was doing his master's and I was doing my bachelor's.

Gee: And so, did you guys get to interact with each other often, or?

Weeden: Not at school. Not really. I hardly saw him at school, just that we graduated at the same time. I have a picture at home of the two of us with—I don't remember—we were with my dad, but I remember our dad was at our graduation.

Gee: Being that you waited to go for your undergrad, you were a nontraditional student.

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: How was that for you, attending Ball State for your undergrad as a nontraditional student?

Weeden: It was interesting. It was fun, and it was a real learning

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experience. As I was over at the Student Center, I just had—was walking trying to get the traffic office, and I saw Vivian Conley Lounge. One of the problems, was I remember being at a class, and there was a Grad Assistant who was teaching, and everything was like geared towards the—most of the students were people who had just graduated from high school, and they were like eighteen and nineteen. I was like twenty-nine, and I remember saying something to him, because some of the questions that he asked I felt didn't relate to me, because they were geared towards kids who had just graduated.

[54:00]

And then, they would talk about partying all the time, and all that. You know, those kind of things, which I didn't do. I had two kids and a job. But, once I mentioned it to him, he appreciated it because he said he didn't realize I was that old. But, it was—I think it was better for me, because graduating—Starting school at twenty-nine and then when I graduated, I think that helped me as far as teaching because I didn't have a lot of problems with the kids. I think the students tend to see me more as kind of a mother figure. So, I really—I never had problems with behavior. I mean, kids were kids,

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but I never had discipline problems, because I treated the kids just like I did my own. And so, I think they just kind of saw me as another mother.

Gee: And how was it—you know you said you were twenty-nine, you had two kids and a job, and you were attending school. Was that a struggle for you emotionally? Financially? How did you juggle all of those responsibilities?

Weeden: Well, I had help. My parents—I always lived near my parents. Most of the time, I could stand in my front of my house and look down the street if I wanted to send my kids down there. I could stand in front of my house and watch them walk the two blocks to my parents' house. So, I had a lot of help.

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If I'd had not had my parents, I don't think I would have been able to do it, because I would not have been able to afford a babysitter. Because I was working part-time, and then at one point, I was working two jobs, and I was working at night. In undergrad, I had of course day classes, but I could only work for the three years, because the fourth year—and I didn't know this until it happened—but I couldn't hold a job because I had to do student teaching. And they said, Well, when you're doing student teaching, we will increase the amount of money you get because you can't work. Yeah, it was a struggle.

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It's just something you set up a routine, and this is what you do. And then the kids is like, you got to be on the move. You get up in the morning—I can remember, my kids were four years apart, and when my son—I did get him in daycare; it was a very reasonable daycare. And he only went like half-day, because he was in kindergarten. So, I would send my daughter, who was four years older than my son, would take him to daycare then go across the street to school. So, if the daycare had not been right there and reasonable, I would have had to be at home. Then, having my dad, because my dad was a pastor, he didn't work a job. You know, I don't mean that pastoring is not work, but

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he didn't have somewhere that he had to go and clock in. So, if I needed—if one of the kids was sick and I needed him to get them or something, he could do that. I didn't have a car, so that was a problem that made things difficult, too, because I had to ride the bus back and forth. My oldest brother bought me a car. Just a lot of things. My family just kind of grouped around me to make sure I was—would be successful in what I was doing. Matter of fact, I went to my—my older brother, my oldest brother is a pastor, and I went to his church Sunday. And he said, "This is my baby sister, and I think she was the first in our family to go to college!" And I wasn't actually the first one, but just the fact that I went meant something to

everybody in the family,

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so everybody just kind of helped out.

Gee: And, seeing that you were a nontraditional student, probably didn't have a lot of time for a lot of extracurricular activities—

Weeden: No.

Gee: —but you did participate in the Minority Student Union.

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: What was that experience for you? What was your membership like in that organization?

Weeden: I remember being in the choir. They had a choir. The—what's it called now?

Gee: Voices of Triumph?

Weeden: Yeah, Voices of Triumph.

Gee: Yes.

Weeden: Then, it was just I think Student Union Choir. But, I went to a few meetings that they would meet over in the Minority House—we called it the Black House. And, we would meet over there, and sometimes there would be speakers that came in. And when—I just kind of counted stuff like that as a part of my class time. So,

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most of the stuff was during the day that I participated in, while my kids were in school. Then, I could do that. I worked in the evening, so a lot of night things I didn't—couldn't participate in, but my boss, if it was something like for a class, then he would allow me to take off and come to that. That didn't happen very often. But, I was never in a sorority. Never made a lot of friends. I think I might have had one friend? One or two? Because I was commuting back and forth. I came to school at time for class, basically, and if I had an hour between class then I stayed out here at the—went to the library or somewhere and studied.

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And when the class was out, back home—because I either had to get ready to go to work, or I had get ready fix dinner for the kids or something. So, I mean, you

just have to want to do it, because there's not that fun time in there.

Gee: By not being able to join as many organizations or joining Greek life or anything like that, did you feel—did you feel like you missed out on anything?

Weeden: I felt like I missed out on a part of the experience of being in college. It was just like every day—it was like you just go take a class. That's what it felt. You may have a class three days a week, and so where other kids were out here and they were going to— they were doing things like they were pledging. They were just doing

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things that seemed like so much fun, but I had to get on the bus and get back home. So yeah, I felt like I missed out.

Gee: Now, we read a text called *Ball State University: An Interpretive History*, and in that text it spoke of BSA, Black Student Association. I don't know if that was similar to the Minority Student Union?

Weeden: Probably the same group.

Gee: Okay. In 1986, the president was David Coatie, who was basically acting as sort of an activist on campus at that time. Do you have any relation to him?

Weeden: That's my nephew, but—well, yeah. He's my nephew. He lived in New Castle. His—well, that's not even a part of the answer. I started to say his mother had a lot of kids. But, that was a very large family. But,

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David was very active at Ball State

Gee: Okay, and during your undergrad you worked at the Muncie Star, it was called at the time, in Classified Advertising, as you mentioned before. What all was entailed in that position, and what was the experience you got while you were there?

Weeden: It was classified ads that you see in the newspaper. My job was to write those. So, we did customer service. People would either come in or call in, and place an ad. And we had to write them up—like they would tell us what they had to sell, or what they—Some of them were doing memorials, or if they wanted a picture or whatever. So my job was to take their ad, and then we placed them—for the newspaper—made sure

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we got them in on time. That was it. Just customer service.

Gee: And this is what you worked up until you had to do your student teaching?

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: Okay, and you mentioned an issue you had with a professor. I don't remember if you mentioned if it was your Research Methods professor?

Weeden: Research.

Gee: Okay, so we've talked about that a little bit and how that was not really a good relationship, to the point where you had to write to the president of the university and to the department heads. Were there any other experiences like that that you faced during your time at Ball State? Undergrad and during your master's program.

Weeden: I think, basically, my experiences were good. I came back the year after I graduated. I was working in Marion, and so sometimes on my way home I would stop over at Teachers College just

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to see what was going on. And, they had all these different committees, and they had a committee for, I think was the committee for minority recruitment. And, I was looking at their organizational thing, and the chairman of that committee was that same professor. And, I questioned, "How is he the chairman of the committee to recruit minorities, when his stand was he didn't believe that we belonged here?" And they said, Well, he volunteered. So, I think maybe they just—someone got in the department that—for the wrong reasons. But, I never had a problem with any of the other

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professors.

Gee: So, given that situation with that professor, and you know, you did at this point make others aware of this situation—

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: —unlike when you were in high school, and you kind of had to accept it as it was. With this professor, you made administration aware of what was going on, and it doesn't seem like he was reprimanded in any way for what he did to you. How did that make you feel about Ball State's claim for diversity and inclusion at that

time?

Weeden: Well, I felt like Ball State was just like the rest of Muncie. I think, a lot of times there's a problem dealing with people who are different. They just don't understand

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how people think, or what people do, and they tend to treat people differently. But because you look like me, I understand what you mean, or I understand your thinking. And so, a lot of times perhaps I'll make excuses for it, and I think that's the way that Ball State was. I think that Ball State has grown a lot, and I think they have a better record for diversity now than they did. Because, then even, they were trying to bring professors in, people of color. I had, think his name was Michael Brown? Excellent professor. Of course, he didn't stay. In undergrad I had a,

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I think it's James Scott, taught I think it was Intro to Sociology. Wonderful professor, and he didn't stay either. But, I think that Ball State was trying to grow in that area and bring in people of color, so that they would be more diverse. And there would be people here who actually would be held accountable for their actions. But, I just—I've never been afraid to speak up, and so even if nothing happens, then if I speak up and address the issue, you can't say, "I didn't know."

Gee: Right.

Weeden: Because I'm going to make sure that I address it. Whether they do anything about it or not, I got through his class, and

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I got hired as a counselor, and I didn't need his recommendation.

Gee: Right. And you mentioned that you never had an African American teacher until you came here to Ball State—

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: —at the age of twenty-nine.

Weeden: Right.

Gee: How did—Did that further impact your decision to go into education? Even before you met this professor, not having any African American teachers.

Weeden: Well I wanted to go in because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of minority students. Then, after I got to Ball State, there were so few. I started thinking; the Caucasians needed African American teachers as well. So, that helped me realize that I had made the right decision,

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because I think a lot of the problems stem from the fact that a lot of Caucasians grow up not having been around people of color, so then they don't know how to deal with them, or how to get along with them. If we—I mean if we never come together, if—like I grew up never seeing—there was never an African American principal, assistant principal, teacher, student teacher. None of that when I was growing up. I never had any of that. So, to me it would not be surprising that not many of the kids said, “I want to be a teacher.” We didn't see teachers, so that wasn't something necessarily that we thought about being. And had there not

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been a national shortage of teachers, I would not have thought about being a teacher, because that really wasn't something that we did. But, there was a shortage, and so that helped my decision. And then when I got to Ball State, Dr. James Scott was my first teacher, my class. And when I went in that classroom, and he came in, it was like, Hallelujah! I had never, ever seen a black teacher. Never!

Gee: It was like seeing a unicorn! (laughs)

Weeden: Yes! Yes! And I mean I was like telling everybody! “Guess what!?! My teacher, my very first class, my teacher is a black man!”

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I mean, it was just exciting.

Gee: So, following your undergrad, you came back to Ball State for grad school where you received your master's in Counseling Psychology. During that time, you were also a Graduate Assistant. What did you do in this position?

Weeden: I worked most of the time at a Learning Center. I don't know if they still have that?

Gee: Yeah.

Weeden: Okay.

Gee: Um-hm.

Weeden: The Learning Center—I was a Grad Assistant over the Learning Center. I supervised tutors, and signed—got people signed up, matched up with the tutors for whatever they needed help with. Before I started working in the Learning Center, I did little whatever they came

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up with for me to do.

Gee: So, after you finish your undergrad and your grad school programs, what was the journey after graduation as far as moving into your career?

Weeden: Okay. Well, I grew up in Muncie. Went to Muncie schools all the way through. I graduated undergrad. Could not get a job in Muncie schools. Then I—when I came back and went to grad school, graduated, could not get a job in Muncie. So I went to work in Marion as a vocational counselor. And, I worked at Tucker area; whatever the long name was that had Vocational Technical College. My job was to—I went to the high school in

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Grant County and to ta—make presentations to the students and enr—try to get students to enroll in Tucker. Their enrollment was very low, and so they said they needed the enrollment increased. So, that was my job. That's what I did everyday. And, at Marion High School, they had given me a table and a place that I could sit down at the cafeteria, and I—at the cafeteria during lunchtime. And then during the day, I could be in the area with the counselors and send for students, and come in and talk to them and tell them about the school and different opportunities. So, I got students enrolled. Another thing that I did, was I went out and talked to community groups like the Coalition of

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Clergymen, which was the pastors. And I would go to churches and make presentations. That first year, the enrollment more than doubled. And I found that I really enjoyed doing that, but I didn't know how it worked—common sense would have told me if I would have thought about it—but if the kids were enrolling to go to Tucker, that meant they were coming out of the Marion High School, or whatever high school. And so, the next year when school started and I went back, I was being jumped by the teachers, the department chairs, business department, because they said I had taken so many of their kids and got them to enroll, that they had lost a teacher

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in their business department. I didn't know how it worked. I just thought I was doing what I was asked to do. So that year was more difficult. I was not allowed in the counselors' office to work. I was not allowed in the cafeteria to work. I could just sit at a little desk out in the hall. I was not allowed to send passes for students. It was just if when students came to go to lunch, if they wanted to stop and talk to me they could. If not, too bad. I just couldn't talk to them. I could no longer send for them. I wasn't—I couldn't take a pass and send for them any longer. But, I still went to the

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county schools. At the county schools I could go in to the auditorium and they would bring the students in, and I would talk to them that way and got students to sign up. Then, during that—after school started that year, was when Muncie Central called. And the principal at Muncie Central called the principal at the school at Tucker and talked to him. And the principal at Tucker came in and he literally begged me not to leave. And, I would not have left. The only reason I left was because my mother was very ill. I had actually—The reason I was at Ball State in grad school, was because I came back to help take care of my mom. And so,

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I took the job in Muncie, and I came to work in Muncie—I believe it was either the end of September or the beginning of October, and my mom died in February that following year. So, I was in Muncie until I retired.

Gee: And did you hold any other job positions besides the Marion Vocational School, and then going into Muncie Central?

Weeden: In undergrad—well not in undergrad—after undergrad, I went to Wisconsin and I taught school in Milwaukee for twelve years. And then, I came back to Muncie.

Gee: And what positions did you hold within Muncie Central?

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Weeden: Counselor.

Gee: Okay.

Weeden: For three or four years, I think I was the department chair.

Gee: For counseling?

Weeden: Um-hm?

Gee: Okay. Now, you have three children?

Weeden: Yes.

Gee: And what was it like for you—you know obviously you had your children before you went to college, so you've been a mom for a while. What is it like for you to be a mom?

Weeden: It's a lot of work. A lot of work! It's—I think it's a growth process, because I have three: the oldest one I adopted, then I have a birth son and a birth daughter, but each one of them is different.

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They're just so totally different. So, you learn a lot, and you have to be—you can't be stuck in one like, I'm right because I'm the mom. That's not always the case that you're right. I've learned to be patient, and I've learned to listen sometimes. And it was difficult for me sometimes to—it's like, because you want to have your hand in everything. You don't want anything to slip by. And so, you're trying to do so much. But, I learned how to allow other people to help, and I found

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out that people are willing to help if you allow them. When I lived in Wisconsin, there was—people moved to Milwaukee from New York, and this woman had five kids. And, her kids were in the school where I worked. And, it just so happened that I had them in class, and they said their mom was looking for a place to live. So, I told her the townhouse next door to me was empty, and she was able to get it. And, I never had to cook after that. (laughs) And that helped a lot, because she had five kids, so she was always cooking a bunch of stuff, and she was always feeding my kids for me. And things like that just happened all along.

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So, I just had a lot of help, and it wasn't as difficult for me, I think, as for some people that have just been overwhelmed by—but I could come home and sit at the table and grade papers and know that my kids were okay. So, I have a son, who it's—I think it's difficult trying to raise a son when you're not married. His dad died when he was ten, I believe. But, he always had other men in his life, like my dad, my brothers, my brother-in-law. They were always doing things with him, but it's just not the same.

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So, I just—I feel like I learned a lot from my kids. And, I’m learning even more from my grandchildren.

Gee: (laughs)

Weeden: They are a different breed. Yeah. I’m learning a lot from the one—the five-year-old. She’s—I just, every day I just say, “God, please protect her,” (both laugh) because she’s one who says what she thinks, and she asks questions, and not everybody appreciates that from a kid. I think that—I think God put kids—gives us children as gifts, and watches to see what we’re going to do with them. And, one of the things

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that I’ve felt with her—because she’s so active, and I’m afraid that people get frustrated with her because she’s just doing stuff all the time. I just had this feeling like God was saying, Don’t ever beat the life out of her.

Gee: (laughs)

Weeden: I mean, she flips all the time, so I just say, Flip! Flip! But, you don’t want to take your kid to church and have them (both laugh) flip down the aisle. (both laugh) But, you know what I did? For New Year’s Eve, for our—we have Watch Night Service—

Gee: Um-hm.

Weeden: —and so, I was doing a skit. And, I had told them, “She is going to flip in this church,” because that’s what she does. And so, I wrote it into the script, and she was allowed to—she had to come out and play and flip across the front of the church. And so,

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you know, it just says there’s room for all of us.

Gee: Um-hm.

Weeden: I learned that from my kids. We’re all different, but don’t stifle the gifts that your kids have. And, it was the same thing with the kids that I worked with in school. And, I did substitute teaching, too, after I retired. I guess I didn’t have enough. (both laugh) Yeah.

Gee: What values did you try to instill in your children?

Weeden: I tried to teach them to not be stuck on material things, but to grow inside to have

a heart for other people. Trying to—and with my grandchildren, trying to teach them

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not to be bullies, but to treat—and my kids, too—to treat other people like the Golden Rule. I don't really hear people talk about the Golden Rule anymore, but I tried to teach that to my kids, and I try to teach my grandchildren, "Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you." Treat people the way you want to be treated, and don't say mean things to people. Help somebody, and just don't—well, I say don't be hateful. To me that's one of the most important characteristics that a person can have. Just be kind. Be helpful to people. And you never know how much people appreciate it and what they'll do for you if you're kind to them.

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Gee: How did you try to prepare your children for the possible racism they could face in life? And did they face any challenges like that?

Weeden: Yes. Unfortunately, I didn't do as good a job as my parents did with me, because every—life being busy, and they're busy and I'm busy. With the one that I adopted, we spent more time with her, because she was the only baby around. So, we would try to teach her, Don't take it personally. Because, back then—let me see, she is fifty-four—and when she was a kid, I can remember times going to the Public Library downtown with my mother.

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And a lady was coming up the stairs—up the steps—with her little girl, and my mother and I and my daughter were coming down the steps. And this little kid sees us, and she goes, (screams). And she's just like she's scared to death! And she's hanging onto her mom, and getting behind her. The mom says, "You're okay, don't worry." But what she said to my mom was, "Please, don't get no black on me!" I mean, my mom wasn't—But, the kid didn't know. And so, I had to just—like, my daughter was like, "Well, what's wrong with her? Why is she doing that?" And so, I had just to explain that to her in saying, "Don't take it personally when people do or say things like that,

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because they don't know any better," and just tell her, "You are better than,"—which I shouldn't have said that I'm sure—but, "you are as good as and better than some." So, I just tried to encourage them. With my youngest daughter, who is eleven years younger than my son, it was different because I was working like in the high school. She was seven years old when we moved back to—when we moved to Indiana. When she moved; I moved back. She was seven years old, and

when we were in Wisconsin she had not experienced any kind of discrimination. She had gone

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to a Spanish Immersion school to start, and everybody had to speak Spanish. Everything. From the time you got—well, she didn't have to speak it on the bus, but when she got off the school bus, until the time she got back on the school bus, everybody had to speak Spanish. So, it's like everybody was the same. You were Spanish! But when we came to Muncie, I think that's the first time she experienced anything. They would say stuff like—and a lot of what she experienced was from African American students. "You trying to be white, because you make good grades." As though being smart was something that belonged to the

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Caucasians. With school, when I was in high school, there was a quota on the number of African Americans that could be in the Honors Society. So, it wasn't open to just everybody to be in there. My daughter—just some things that happened. I remember once, students at the last day of school, they would bring water guns to school, and they would let them go out and have a water gun fight on the lawn away from the school. One day, my daughter and her—couple of her friends, they had brought their water guns to school. They were in their backpacks, no water in them. And, a teacher tried to take them away from them, and they went into the

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bathroom. This man, teacher, followed them into the ladies' bathroom, and then called the lady, a woman teacher, to come in. And she came in to take their water guns from them. Other students had them. Theirs was in their backpacks, and they came in to take them because she said, "They were 'going' to put water in them." They didn't have water. But the teacher said, "Well, the man said that they were going to put water in them." And so, it was his job to take them away, and they did take them. I worked in the school at that time. I was working in Muncie Central. I had gone from being this passive person that just sat back. So, he took them—took the girls to the office and took

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their water guns to the office. And one of the—I'm doing a hall duty, and one of them came and told me—because I see all these other kids, all these Caucasians, with water guns and nothing being said. So, when they came and told me that they had taken their—well my daughter came, said they had taken her water gun. I had just bought that water gun the night before!

Gee: (laughs)

Weeden: And I'm like, What? Who took it? Where? So, they had taken it into the office, into the assistant principal's office, and put them in that. I was so upset. I don't know if it was over the fact that I had paid money for this big water gun, or what? But I went in there and took the water gun back, and then got the other two girls' water guns, too. And I was like, Lord, I need a break. I know I need a break, because when I

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would see different things going on, I would make note of differences that were being made among students. At one point, I was going to write a book about the things that were happening in the cla—in the schools, because there were (unintelligible)—people were making differences between the students, and I don't think they even realized what they were doing; that they were making a difference. But, it's like, when they would give—like send a kid to the office, and they would write down what the infraction was. I had—there was a white student and a black student. Their reports said the very same thing. Exact wording.

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Teacher had—because they were both doing the same thing. And, the teacher had written it down, had sent them to the office, and when they came—they were both my students. When they brought their papers over to me, what the assistant principal had written to send home—and I saw those papers—what he had put on the minority student's paper was not the same as what he put on the other paper. And, as the one student was disruptive, and the other student had moved something. But, the minority student was disruptive. I had to speak up about that because, I said, "You don't understand. As a parent, you send me a paper home saying my kid is disruptive in the class, that paints a picture for me

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that's quite different from saying that he just moved his chair, or he got in the wrong seat. That says a whole different story. And being a minority parent, I know how minority parents perceive that." And the person who wrote it said he'd never thought about it. He didn't realize that it would be any—that it was anything different. But, it was. Being there with my daughter, there were times when we were looking for students for different awards or scholarships, and they had to have a certain GPA, or they had to be in a certain—have a certain rank. Her counselor never considered her, and he would sit there and say,

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“I don’t have nobody. I don’t have anybody.” And I’m like, “Did you check your list? Well, I know you have one!” And he says, “Oh, well I thought you’d take care of her?” So, it was like kind of always pushing her off to the side, and not giving her what she was entitled to. She had to put up with a lot of things. I think, basically, because I was working there in the school.

Gee: Okay, what—your father was a pastor—

Weeden: Um-hm.

Gee: and you are now a pastor, correct?

Weeden: I’m not a pastor, but I am a minister.

Gee: Okay, so what role has religion played in your life?

Weeden: Well, I would say not religion itself, because I just see religion as like a lot of rules.

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But, spirituality guides my life. I have just always been a person that I try to seek after God. Wanting to know more, to understand more, and to be able to do more. So, before I went to grad school, I felt that God was leading me to come back to Muncie. And I didn’t want to come. I mean who wants to come back to Muncie? After I lived in Wisconsin, it took me a year to learn how to get around in Milwaukee, but I had become accustomed to it. I loved it up there! It was like God was saying to me, Go home and help your dad. For two years,

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I struggled with that, because I didn’t want to come back to Muncie. But it just seemed like everything, everybody I came in contact, every time I went to church—no matter what church I went to—it was like I was getting the same message. It would be something about go home, like the Prodigal Son. Somebody preaching the Prodigal Son. Or, it just continuously—and I finally—the reason I decided to come back to Muncie when I did, was I was working for the Archdiocese. They’re inner-city Catholic schools. And so, they had decided that they were going to start a new something with the schools, and they were going to close all of the schools, and everybody had to apply for a job. And then they were going to open it up; it’s going to be a new school system. Which meant, technically, that I didn’t have a job. And so, they were

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asking me to apply to be the Director of Music for all the schools, all of their

schools. And, I just finally said, Nope! I guess this just means I need to go home? I don't have a job. So, I wrote my dad and told him that I felt that I should come home, that I was praying and I felt that God was saying, Go home and help your dad. And, my dad wrote me back and said, "I have been praying for two years that you would come home." And that's how long I had been struggling with the idea of coming back. And he said, "I knew if I asked you to come that you would, but I wanted you to decide to come." Then, I applied to Ball State, and got accepted, and came back to Muncie.

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I came back to Muncie on July 4, 1985. That was on a Wednesday, I think that year. No, it wasn't a Wednesday. That was on a Saturday. And that Saturday—Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday—four days later I was all moved in and everything, and went to Bible Study on that Tuesday. And that Sunday, my dad turned the church over to me, and said, "This is what I need you to help with." So, I pastored the church for four years, simply because my dad asked me to. That's not my calling to be a pastor, but I had to do it because he asked me to. When the first day—I came out to be interviewed for the

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Psychology program, and when I—the last year that I was in Wisconsin, the Archdiocese had said they would pay for one person in each school to go to Alverno College and take this course, because when—up there they have like the school psychologist in the community school. But, before they get to the Catholic schools, they have to make their rounds to all of the public schools first. And so, usually they didn't get to us until the end of the school year. So, if we had a kid that needed to be tested, you didn't get results back until the next year. So, the Archdiocese said that they would pay for one person out of each one of the schools to go to Alverno College. So, they had to choose someone, and I was chosen from our school. And

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in order to—for the Archdiocese to pay, they had to give me one day a week where I could take the whole afternoon and give me a room, an office, and I would test students that were recommended for testing. Doing that, I just decided this is the chance to get to be a counselor. I enjoyed the testing, but I wanted—I thought I could do that and be a counselor. But when I got here, they told me to do the testing I would need to go into Educational Psychology instead of Counseling Psych. But I wanted to be a counselor, so I stuck with the Counseling Psych. And that day, I went home and I got a phone call, and they said, "You didn't apply for Grad Assistant." And I didn't even

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know what Grad Assistant was? And I said, “Oh, was I supposed to? I didn’t know?” And they had a position available. And actually, they didn’t have anything for me to do, but they needed—they had the position, so they needed somebody in the position so they wouldn’t lose it. So, I got the job, but before I came I had been praying that—I believe very strongly in prayer, and I had been praying, and I said, God I need a job, because I need a way to make money, but I can’t work a lot of hours because I had my one daughter with me; she was seven. I’m helping take care of my mom, who was an involute. And, I had the church. So, I need a job, but not too hard and not too many hours. And they called me, and I said, “What do I have to

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do?” They said, “Well, come back out here and fill out the papers, and we’ll tell you what to do.” So that’s what I did, and that was my job for the first year.

Gee: Great! As we get close to the end of the interview, I want to make sure we get in some really important questions. I saw a photo from one of the reunions of the black—Ball State University Black Alumni Constituent Society. Are you a member of that organization?

Weeden: I don’t know? I don’t know? I know the Ball State Black Alumni—is that the same thing?

Gee: Yeah, yeah.

Weeden: Okay, yes.

Gee: Okay, yeah. Because I saw you in the photo, but I didn’t know if you—So what is your participation in that organization?

Weeden: Just when they have their reunion here, usually I

[1:46:00]

come to the dinner, and the picture taking whatever. I don’t do the tour, or anything. But, basically, that’s it. Last year I didn’t come, because my brother wasn’t able to come, and I didn’t come.

Gee: Okay. And as far as—you said you went through your whole educational career in Muncie. You’ve lived in Muncie pretty much your whole life. Besides your time in Wisconsin, you haven’t ventured far from Muncie. What is the love and pride in the Muncie community that you have that keeps you here?

Weeden: I did live in Ohio for a short time. My son was born in Ohio, but I came back to

Muncie. The thing that has always brought me back to Muncie has been family. And

[1:47:00]

the thing that keeps me here I think is just that I don't make change easily. Like when I moved to Wisconsin it took me a year to get accustomed to being there. And when I moved back to Muncie it like took me a year to get accustomed to being here. And when I felt that I should move back, it took me two years to make that move. I don't adapt to change very easily, very quickly. And so, it's easier to stay here than it is to go anyplace else.

Gee: And one of my final questions: What changes, and/or similarities, do you see in the African American community from when you were growing up to now?

Weeden: When I was growing up, everybody was family. It was like, you knew people, and even if you didn't know them, if you saw them on the street or passed by them you spoke. You looked at them, and you would say, Hey, how are you doing? Or something. And now, people—

[1:48:00]

I mean, they don't look at you. They don't speak to you. It's like you just—you don't know people anymore. It doesn't feel like family, and I think that's a loss for us.

Gee: Before we close the interview, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like people to know about your life, career, or experiences at Ball State or afterward?

Weeden: Not—well, I was the first African American hired in Muncie at AT&T. At that time, it was Indiana Bell Telephone Company. And I was the first person hired as a long-distance operator. Previous to that, they only had them in housekeeping and the janitor.

Gee: And what did that accomplishment serve

[1:49:00]

for you in your life?

Weeden: Well, it gave me a good job! (both laugh) And it opened the door for others to come in, because after that they started hiring African Americans.

Gee: And is there anything else you would like to add? Any final advice or comments?

Weeden: I love Ball State, and I've met a lot of wonderful people out here. Some of the grad students were really helpful. There was one from Teachers College, that—he doesn't work for Teachers College, but he works for the alumni I think. But, he met me someplace and talked; we had coffee and talked. And he just made things available. I like the way that they try to keep you up to date on what's going on at Ball State. And I enjoy the

[1:50:00]

students, because I have found students at Ball State to be very personable. And we have college ministry at our church, and there are some of them that come to that. I just enjoy being around college students.

Gee: And do you have any advice for any future educators?

Weeden: Get to know the kids and treat them like you would want your kids to be treated. And expect great things from them, because kids tend, or everybody, tends to live up to your expectations. So, expect the best.

Gee: Okay! Well on behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project, I'd like to thank you for your participation today!

Weeden: Um-hm. Thank you!

[1:50:48]

End of interview

Marquice Gee
Monday, May 1, 2017
HONR 390 Oral History Workshop: Ball State University
African-American Alumni Oral History Project
Dr. Michael Doyle

Questions for Oral History Interview with Cynda Williams on
26 March 2017,
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

NOTES

Ms. IN Beth Wagner
 Heal Making decisions on his black
 William Lee Guiding light in theater

Hello my name is M.G., today is Sun. March 26, 2017,
 + I am interviewing Cynda Williams on Ball State's
 campus as part of the BSU Afr. Amer. Alumni Oral
 History Project. Welcome Ms. Williams...

- Born May 17, 1946 in Chicago, IL. Tell parents' names + how life was like growing up in Chicago.
- Biracial. How did you handle that growing up? Identify black
- When + why did you move to Muncie? "Culture Shock"
- Experience @ Northside High; Transition to BSU. Why?
- How did you decide on your major? Influence; prof./fam.
- Educational + social environment?
- John E. Worthen admin.; university technology; how help while @ BSU + advance career?
- 1986 edition BS IN, article on issue of minority enrollment want program like IU groups. Racial climate + diversity?
- Same edition, "Raisin in the Sun" dir. James Hardin Ireland
- Acting experience @ BSU + prep for real world
- In 1987 became 1st Afr. Amer. Miss BS. What remember about process?
 - Sang "Being Alive" from musical "Company"
 - 2 other black girls dropped, why? + why you stay?
 - Miss IN → Miss America, life as beauty queen?
- How did you unwind on campus?
- '88 music group w/ James Williams "Spirit"; Inspire?
- Graduate: Value of education? Next steps *Name change*
- Game plan in entertainment as Afr. Amer. woman? Struggles
- 1990 - Premier film "Mo' Better Blues" w/ Spike Lee, Denzel w/ Wesley
- Clark Snipes. Surreal. Open eyes to acting world? Realities faced?
 Pentecost
 Show versatility (singing)
 - Sept. '90 DN talk @ Burris High; Q: How feel to be famous?
 A: "I do not feel famous. I am still the same me." Meaning then + now?

- Mo'... - Disrespected; Denzel "feet too big"; Harassment?
How make it through?

Move to culture

- 90's iconic fashion era; How did you use fashion to reflect your personal style + personality?
- ~2002 had daughter? Name? Experience/Transformation?
 - Force to grow? Alter career path?
 - Influence of family growing up; Values instilled in her?
- Twist- 2005 Certified Hypnotherapist; Purpose?
- '98 Sarina Classer in "Relax... It's Just Sex"; Lesbian; LGBTQ+ rights is issue + popular topic. Not as accepted in Afr. Amer. community. Prepare for role? Views on expressing sexuality especially in Afr. Amer. community?

Go Back - Early in career find out Grave's Disease. What? Impact

- Still have? How cope?
- 2010 emcee Indiana has Talent youth + adult talent comp. by Ak'bar Shabazz. Tell more + experience
- As part, how does it make you feel to give back to your community
- Book + blog Pink Tantie Confessions. Inspiration?

Looking Back - What purpose do your memories serve?

- How did your time at BSU help mold you into who you are today?
- What advice do you have for teens/young adults pursuing acting/chasing dreams in general?

Before we close the interview, is there anything I haven't asked you about that you would like people to know about your life, career, or experiences at Ball State or afterward?

On behalf of the Ball State University African American Alumni Oral History Project, I'd like to thank you for your participation!

Pre-Interview Notes
Conducted by Frank Lacopo
On 2/21/17

Initial Telephone contact with Cynda Williams

-An Indiana native who had aspirations to leave the state for drama school, but had two children before she was able to achieve that dream. As a result, she improvised by attending Ball State.

-The drama department provided what she describes as excellent training that put her on the path success as an actress.

-Has had very successful drama career, mainly in Hollywood films.

-She recently wrote a successful book on her life experiences and travels a good deal at present as a result. She thus has a tight schedule but will gladly participate if we accommodate for that.

-Cynda Williams will make an excellent oral history interviewee. While she caught me off-guard with a phone call while I was walking across campus and I was thus unable to record many details of her personal information, she had a clear speaking voice and is manifestly eager to participate in our project.

CYNDA WILLIAMS

BIOGRAPHY

Cynda began a professional life of acting and singing after relocating to New York from her native Chicago. Her debut film **MO' BETTER BLUES** directed by Spike Lee, was a critical and commercial success. Blessed with a role that also required singing, her song **HARLEM BLUES** went #1 on the R&B charts. That film opened the door to her next performance in Carl Franklin's **ONE FALSE MOVE** - the true icebreaker for Cynda's career. This break out independent film appeared on many Best Film lists and Cynda was nominated for the coveted *Spirit Award*.

Cynda has since appeared in numerous films including: Christopher Nolan II's **72 HOURS**, Stewart Wade's **TRU LOVED**, John Nolte's **BEAUTIFUL LOSER**, Salvador Litvak's **WHEN DO WE EAT**, Billy Wirth's **MACARTHUR PARK**, P.J. Castellante's **RELAX...IT'S JUST SEX**, Darin Scott's **CAUGHT UP** and Wesley Strick's **THE TIE THAT BINDS**. She has also performed memorable quality television roles including: BET's **HIDDEN BLESSINGS**, LIFETIME'S **THE COURAGE TO LOVE**, HBO's **DOROTHY DANDRIDGE**, *Oprah Winfrey's ABC* miniseries, **THE WEDDING** and *PBS' TALES OF THE CITY*.

Cynda also sings and acts on stage. She most recently appeared in **THE TALENTED TENTH**, **LANGSTON IS MY MAN**, **HOPE RUNS ETERNAL**, **TWILIGHT IN LOS ANGELES, 1992**, **MAKE EM' LAUGH, MAKE EM' LAUGH A CHRISTMAS CABARET**, **IMMEDIATE FAMILY**, **DREAM GIRLS** and **Mother 4,5 & 7**.

Cynda sings professionally for film and on the stage. She sings Jazz, Americana and R&B with The WES Group, Micheal Martin Band and The C & Ronnie G's Band.

Cynda continues creating content - writing screenplays, musicals, and books. She looks forward to bringing her creations to life with the commercial production of these works. Her current project is the release of her first book, **Pink Pantie Confessions**, a self-help memoir. She is producing a fictional film loosely based on her book. Cynda continues to sing, and accept quality roles in film, television and theatre.

CYNDA WILLIAMS
ACTRESS
SAG/AFTRA

FILM

A CHANCE IN THE WORLD (2017)
RAY MEETS HELEN (2016)
72 HOURS (2014)
TURNING POINT (2012)
HOME WEDLOCK (2011)
TRU LOVED (2008)
BEAUTIFUL LOSER (2007)
DIVINE INTERVENTION (2007)
WHEN DO WE EAT (2005)
MACARTHUR PARK (2001)
RELAX...ITS JUST SEX (1998)
CAUGHT UP (1998)
ONE FALSE MOVE (1992)
MO' BETTER BLUES (1990)

DIR. MARK VADIK
DIR. ALAN RUDOLPH
DIR. CHRISTOPHER NOLEN II
DIR. NIYI TOWOIAWI
DIR. PAX UWOGHIREN
DIR. STEWART WADE
DIR. JOHN NOLTE
DIR. VAN ELDER
DIR. SALVADOR LITVAK
DIR. BILLY WIRTH
DIR. P.J. CASTELLANETA
DIR. DARIN SCOTT
DIR. CARL FRANKLIN
DIR. SPIKE LEE

TV

BOURBAN STREET (2006)
OUR HOUSE (2006)
SHOOTER (2004)
VIOLATION (2003)
HIDDEN BLESSINGS (2000)
THE COURAGE TO LOVE (2000)
INTRODUCING DOROTHY DANDRIDGE (1999)
THE WEDDING (1998)
GANG IN BLUE (1996)
TALES OF THE CITY (1993)

STUDIO C PRODUCTIONS
HALLMARK CHANNEL
SHOWTIME
SHOWTIME
BET
LIFETIME
HBO
NBC MINI SERIES
SHOWTIME
BBC/PBS MINI SERIES

THEATER

IMMEDIATE FAMILY (2014)
DREAM GIRLS (2013)
IMMEDIATE FAMILY (2012)
LOVERS & LULLABYES (2007)
TWILIGHT LOS ANGELES, 1992 (2006)
HOPE RUNS ETERNAL (2006)
LANGSTON IS MY MAN (2005)
THE TALENTED TENTH (2004)

MARK TAPER THEATRE, CA
MUNCIE CIVIC THEATER, IN
GOODMAN THEATRE, IL
CELEBRATION THEATRE, CA
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY, IN
NATE HOLDEN CTR., L.A., CA
THEATRE 3, VA
4305 VILLAGE THEATRE, CA

SKILLS

ACTRESS, SINGER, WRITER, TEACHER

TRAINING

JOHN COPPOLA, LA; JOHN KIRBY, LA; JEFF COREY, LA; GEOFFREY SADWITH, NY; ELIZABETH
TURCOTTE, BALL STATE UNIVERSITY,
BA from BALL STATE UNIVERSITY (1988), HYPNOSIS MOTIVATION INSTITUTE (2005)

CONTACT

STEVEN WOLFE – SNEAK PREVIEW MANAGEMENT (323) 962-0296



Cynda Williams

arts & leisure

Stage experience advantageous

Confidence boosted by winning pageant

BY JULIA SPALDING
Chief Reporter

Her first attempt to capture a scholarship/beauty/talent pageant title was successful for junior Cindy Williams.

The newly named Miss Ball State, who was sponsored by Alpha Psi Omega drama fraternity, said she was surprised and excited when she heard the announcer call her name at the end of Sunday's pageant.

"I really wanted this," Williams said. "I had hoped I would win, but I had no idea I would."

Williams said the competition was stiff, but her experience in stage performance gave her the edge.

"There were a lot of beautiful and talented people there," she said.

Because 50 percent of the points earned in the pageant were based on talent, Williams said she wasn't as nervous during the performance half as she was during her interview with the judges.

"I think the judges knew I was nervous, but so was everyone else," she said.

With performances in Ball State productions "Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris," "Tin Types" and "Kiss Me Kate" under her belt, the theatre major sang "Being Alive" from the musical "Company" for the talent portion of the pageant.

Williams said she decided to compete in the pageant about a year ago because she didn't have that kind of experience, and it looked fun. But she also was attracted by the opportunity to express herself through her talent, a trait she said she picked up from her grandfather, Rev. J.C. Williams.

"I've watched him my entire life help people and love so many unconditionally," she said. "Through my talent and my professional life as a performer, I'd like to do those things in a different way."

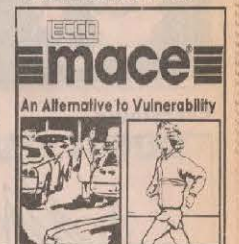
An \$800 scholarship, a clock radio, dinner for two at a Mexican restaurant, three months' membership at a health spa and several gift certificates were included in the list of prizes Williams received, but she said being chosen over the other 35 contestants has a special meaning.

"I'm black, and I think that's a very big accomplishment," she said, adding that she was the only black woman who competed in the pageant after two black contestants dropped out earlier in the contest.

"I feel that Miss Ball State is something everyone should be a part of," she said.

Williams, who will go on to compete in the Miss Indiana pageant in June, said confidence was her greatest gain from the experience of competing for and winning the Miss Ball State title.

"I've always had confidence in my performing, but as an individual I haven't had much until now."



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Junior Cindy Williams, a theatre major, took first place in the Miss Ball State Scholarship Pageant Sunday afternoon in her first attempt at winning a beauty/talent contest.

BY GREGORY SHAYER/Chief Photographer

NCAA championship loses to Academy Awards in ratings game

NEW YORK (AP) — Indiana may have eked out a win over Syracuse for the NCAA basketball championship, but the Academy Awards show was the big winner in the A.C. Nielsen ratings.

According to ratings from 13 major markets, the Oscars got a 33.8 rating and a 53 share Monday night.

The movie awards extravaganza on ABC was only head-to-head against the game on CBS after 9 p.m. EST. The game had started at 8 p.m.

The rating is a percentage of the nation's estimated 87.4 million households with television. The share is a percentage of the available

viewing audience.

This year's Oscar show did considerably better than last year's, the lowest-rated ever with a 27.3 rating and a 43 share.

Indiana won in the final seconds, 74-73. But the game's rating against the Oscars was only 19.1 with a share of 27.

hoops tournament, hoopla and Arthritis Foundation

BY GREGORY SHAYER/Chief Photographer

The team took the prize last year. It was the team from Ball State's fraternity at Ball State.

This year, approximately 64 teams hope to out the reigning champions at the Alpha Psi Omega P. Basketball Marathon in the name of the Arthritis Foundation.

The tournament, which begins at 7 p.m. Saturday and concludes at 11 p.m. Sunday, will top off a fund drive by the Ball State community to raise this year's \$2,500 — a figure \$2,500 more than last year.

According to chairman Shelly Hays, the event, now in its fourth year, will include a free basketball game, a legs contest, and a contest of a stuffed panda bear.

Admission is open to the public. Admission is a \$2 fee. The Arthritis Foundation is to aid in research in the fight against arthritis.

The basketball marathon is a contest from other colleges on campus. "Organizations on campus are competing. The Phi Delta from Ball State and Lambda Chi Alpha from Ball State University are also competing." Williams said.

Williams said she decided to compete in the pageant about a year ago because she didn't have that kind of experience, and it looked fun. But she also was attracted by the opportunity to express herself through her talent, a trait she said she picked up from her grandfather, Rev. J.C. Williams.

Williams said she decided to compete in the pageant about a year ago because she didn't have that kind of experience, and it looked fun. But she also was attracted by the opportunity to express herself through her talent, a trait she said she picked up from her grandfather, Rev. J.C. Williams.

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"The legs contest is just the comic part," Gerbers said. "It adds a little bit of laughter to the contest. The guys really ham it up."

The basketball competition is divided into two parts. Each team plays two 12-minute games divided by a minute half. When a team wins both games, it advances to the single-elimination round that afternoon.

Competition is separated for men and women, with two divisions, A and B, for both groups.

Prior to elimination play, members of the sorority will present a stuffed panda bear, the sorority's symbol, to 3-year-old Arthritis Foundation Poster Child Hays, who suffers from polyarticular juvenile rheumatoid arthritis.

Hays is the daughter of Russell Hays, an environmental control mechanic for Ball State's Physical Plant.

While the most visible part of the sorority's fund drive is the basketball marathon, the sorority members will also be on community streets collecting contributions.

"For our street collections, we will be at the corners of Jackson and Tillotson, McGalliard and Wheeling, the Scramble Light, and in the Village," Gerbers said. "The street collections are usually the biggest part of the fund-raising."

Businesses also advertise in a sponsors' book that is printed courtesy of Greek's Pizzeria.

The top three trophies for the men's and women's divisions were donated by the Collegiate Book Exchange Alley Shop. Donations were solicited from parents, university alumni, and Muncie residents.

"We also put little collection cans donated by the Arthritis Foundation at area businesses," Gerbers added. "Those only raise a couple hundred dollars."

features

Muncie theatre's 'A Raisin in the Sun' reaps five first-place awards in Ireland

BY BOBO BANNON
Chief Reporter

Flying to Ireland is not a normal part of life in the Muncie Civic Theatre, but the company's performance last month in the land of green suggests that maybe they should do it more often.

The theatre group returned to Muncie June 1 after winning several awards for its performance of "A Raisin in the Sun" in the Dundalk International Amateur Theatre competition in Dundalk, Ireland. The group's return to Muncie was welcomed by a large crowd of admiring people outside the Civic Theatre at about 11 p.m. June 1.

"I think we're all a little light-headed and dizzy now," said James Hardin, director of the winning play and associate professor of theatre at Ball State. "We're afraid it's all a dream and we might wake up to find it's not true."

The group won first-place awards in five categories: best actor (James Wesley Williams), best actress (De Tate), best director (Hardin), best production and the audience award. The audience award was given to the group that received the most votes from the audience for the best performance. Beth Quarles and Cindy Williams also won scrolls for outstanding performances.

Tate and James Wesley Williams are former Ball State students. Cindy Williams and Dante Shaw, another member of the group, are Ball State students. The rest of the Civic Theatre's cast was Muncie citizens. "It took me by surprise," James Wesley Williams said of the experience. "I knew that we as a cast were good, but I had no idea we'd win as many awards as we did."

"It was a beautiful country," Williams added. "The people were nice and they made us feel quite at home. We did improvise during the day at high schools and also had a chance to perform in night clubs, pubs and dinner theatres."

Tate also spoke highly of the experience.

"My reaction is a feeling of awesomeness — the beauty of the country, the hospitality of the people. The whole trip was a fantastic experience."

Tate said one of the things that really stood out to her was "the reception of people of color."

"One lady said, 'It's so nice to look out and see your brown skin. We're sick of seeing white faces all over,'" Tate said.

When the group returned to the United States at Boston's airport, Tate said she noticed a difference.

"It really hit when we got back to Boston. There was no kindness or hospitality that we'd been used to for the past 10 days."

She said the colored population in Dundalk was zero.

The Muncie group was the only participant from the United States in the competition.

"According to Hardin, another group from the United States was initially scheduled to perform but dropped out."

"When we first did the show at Muncie Civic, it was entered in an Indianapolis festival," Hardin said. "This is where Mort Clark saw it. We got some awards there, too."

The competition included 10 groups from different countries, including Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, England, Israel and two from the Republic of Ireland.

Hardin said each group performed its play on separate evenings and was judged by an Irishman named Barry Cassin.

"In terms of Barry Cassin's judgment, we came out very well," Hardin said.

The winning performance wasn't the only thing Hardin liked about the trip. The country itself also pleased him.

"I loved it. It's gorgeous and the people were wonderful," he said.

Unfortunately, there will probably be no more opportunities to see the play.

"I hope we can put it to rest because I have four other shows to work on," Hardin said.

Computer cosmetics making over city

BY STEPHANIE HAUCK
Features Editor

Be on alert. A giant pink computer has invaded Muncie. Its name is "Elizabeth." Last seen L.S. Ayres & Co.

The first cosmetic makeover computer, Elizabeth, is the brainchild of Elizabeth Arden, a division of Eli Lilly and Co. This is the first appearance Elizabeth has made in Muncie.

During its visit, Elizabeth, with the help of a professional makeup artist, will see more than 300 clients, according to Peggy Brewer, the Arden Counter manager at Ayres.

But is Elizabeth really the makeover super computer of the 80's?

"Elizabeth can do three makeovers within a 30 minute period," Ann Maier, an Arden promotional representative said. "The conventional makeover would take two and a half hours to do the same thing."

The computer can process more than 30 million pieces of information every second. The station is composed of a color video display unit, camera, and artist's tablet.

The tablet, otherwise known as a computer graphics pad, and a stylus allow the makeup artist to communicate with the computer.

As the artist moves the stylus along the pad, the client's face undergoes many changes.

Before the makeover takes place, the client has the opportunity to choose what type of makeover she would like, ranging from

makeup for the office to a look for evening. The client then fills out a questionnaire on her skin characteristics and the makeover begins.

"I don't have to take off my makeup," said Elizabeth Jones, a Muncie teacher.

The computer takes a picture of each client which is projected onto a color television screen. The computer then analyzes the image to record the amount of red, blue and green hues found in the skin.

The information is stored for future use in color recommendations. All makeup is then electronically removed by moving the stylus along the graphics pad, showing the woman's unmade-up face.

The stylus has the ability to be eight different types of brushes and can select hundreds of color combinations and methods of application.

To make these decisions, the artist touches the stylus to the corresponding area on the pad. Then, like magic, the new image is projected on the screen.

"It's quicker and more accurate than the other makeovers I've had," said Jones after her makeover.

Most of the women who undergo the makeover say it exceeds all expectations they had upon arrival, Maier said.

In the end, the makeup artist compares the before and after look by dividing the screen into four quadrants and provides the customer with a computer print-out of the Arden products used to obtain the desired look.



Ann Maier, promotional representative for Elizabeth Arden, uses the magic stylus to do a computer-age makeover for Janice Reynolds, Portland, at L.S. Ayres & Co. Monday afternoon.

BY STEPHANIE HAUCK/Features Editor

surprise party

Days Ahead

DIVERSIONS

ARTS UPDATE

EVENTS

"CHILDREN'S ART EXHIBIT," May 14, Art Building Rooms 120 and 122 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
 "EPILEPSY EDUCATION/SUPPORT GROUP," May 15, 7 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., College Avenue United Methodist Church, 1968 W. Main St.
 "SECOND ANNUAL AREA 6 SENIOR GAMES," swimming, golf, bowling, basketball, euchre, tennis, track and field, billiards, table tennis and others, for individuals 55 and older, May 23 to 27, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Call 289-1159 to register.

EXHIBITS

HEALTH-CARE SETTING DESIGNS BY AMERICAN ARCHITECTS, through May 16, exhibitor gallery, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 "AFRICAN ART: IN CULTURAL CONTEXT," selections from the Wally and Brenda Zolman Collection, through April 29, Museum of Anthropology, Burkhardt Building Room 320.
 "53RD ANNUAL STUDENT EXHIBITION," through May 15, 2:30 p.m., Art Gallery.
 "53RD ANNUAL TRI KAPPA REGIONAL ARTISTS EXHIBITION," through May 22, Ft. Wayne Museum of Art, 311 E. Main St.
 "SCULPTURE ALL AROUND," 4,000 years of sculpture, through Jan. 22, Ft. Wayne Museum of Art, 311 E. Main St.

FILMS

"SMILES OF A SUMMER NIGHT," May 13, 7:30 p.m., Prais Hall, free.

LECTURES

"THE CONTINUITY OF GREEK CULTURE," Bernard Knox, Harvard University, May 5, 11 a.m., Student Center Forum Room, free.

MUSIC

STUDENT BRASS CHOIR May 5, 8 p.m., Prais Hall, free.
 WIND ENSEMBLE, May 8, 3 p.m., Prais Hall, free.
 "WHITEHEART," Christian rock, May 6, 8 p.m., Arlington Theater, 10th Street and Arlington Avenue.
 "ART OF JAZZ SERIES," Saxophonist Denis DiBlasio with Ball State Jazz Ensemble, May 7, 7:30 p.m., Emens Auditorium.
 GUITARIST PAUL REILLY, May 9, 8 p.m., Prais Hall.
 FLUTE CHOIR, May 10, 5:30 p.m., Prais Hall, free.
 STUDENT BRASS QUINTETS, May 11, noon, Prais Hall, free.
 SYMPHONY BAND May 11, 8 p.m., Prais Hall.
 STUDENT CENTER MUSIC ENSEMBLES, May 13, noon, Prais Hall, free.
 "EMPIRE BRASS POPS CONCERT," May 14, 8 p.m., Emens Auditorium. Tickets \$12, \$9, \$6 and \$2 after April 15.
 TROMBONE CHOIR, May 15, 8 p.m., Prais Hall, free.
 "QUASAR," reggae/international music band, May 22, 8 p.m., Indiana Roof Ballroom, 140 W. Washington St., Indianapolis. Tickets \$15 at TicketMaster locations.

THEATER

"FIDDLER ON THE ROOF," May 5 to May 8, Repertory Theater, 100 W. 42nd St., Indianapolis. Tickets \$10, \$8 and \$5.
 "ONE-ACT FESTIVAL," May 5, 6 and 7, 8 p.m., Strother Theater.
 "A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM," May 11 to 14, 8 p.m., University Theater.
 "JUST BETWEEN FRIENDS," May 13-14, 20-21, 8 Blocks Off Broadway Studio Theatre, 107 W. Jackson St. Buy tickets at door.
 "THE MIKADO," Gilbert and Sullivan play, May 20-23 and 28 at 8:15 p.m. and May 29 at 2:30 p.m., Muncie Civic Theater.

Group incorporates singing, dancing, acting

'Spirit' is triple threat of talent

BY CARRIE RULLI
 Chief Reporter

The writer for a local musical group has worked with superstars but now is reluctant to play nightclubs and wants to spend his time teaching the business.

The reason the performing group "Spirit" hasn't played in Muncie nightclubs is because there aren't any good ones to play in, James Williams, who leads the group, said.

"Most places want hard rock or country/western music. We can play both, but we're more than that," Williams said.

"Spirit" is a different type of musical group. Its members describe themselves as a "creative ensemble" and prefer to be called a group of performers rather than a band. That seems appropriate because they do much more than sing songs. The group incorporates acting and dancing into their shows as well. Known as the "triple threat" in the professional world, acting, dancing and singing provide a more creative outlet for the members of the group. A strong grasp of these three talents is necessary if a performer is serious about making it big, Dirk Eichison, group member, said.

"Spirit" is made up of about 20 members who perform in various capacities, only six or seven core members perform in all the shows.

James Williams, a Chicago native, writes the lyrics and performs vocals and keyboards. He also programs a drum machine and plays bass parts on the keyboard. Eddy McPeck, a Muncie resident, plays guitar. The four vocalists are senior Cindy Williams, junior Dirk Eichison, senior Beth Wagner and Muncie resident Stacey Bartleson.

About five years ago, Williams formed the group out of a desire to perform and a strong will to help

others who are interested in breaking into the world of performing arts. He acts as a sort of talent agent in that way.

"I look for people who want to be on stage, but (who) don't think they're good enough to join a group. I want to give them a chance to try it out and see if they can make it someday," he said.

Cindy Williams was Miss Ball State 1987. She has been in "Spirit" since it started and attributes her success in the pageant and her future singing and dancing career to "Spirit." She plans to go to Chicago after spring graduation.

"Being a part of this type of group has given me a chance to perform and helped me be a better performer," she said.

Eichison, a theater major, is another example of James Williams' knack for giving aspiring performers the boost they need to get them on their way.

Eichison came to James Williams when he was in high school. He wanted to perform, he said, but he didn't know exactly in what way. The "creative ensemble" provides the "triple threat" of performing that is needed to be a professional, Eichison said.

The group not only enhanced those areas for him but he now has a feel for the technical aspect of a musical group, which he is sure will be valuable later, he said.

Eichison described his involvement with James Williams' group as an "open-minded, creative adventure."

"The group is a very accepting one, which really helps. Other groups don't have that aspect. It's an 'I'm okay, you're okay' attitude," he said.

At the end of the quarter, Eichison also is leaving the group. He was accepted on scholarship to the

American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York, where he will study for two years. He doesn't know if he will return to Ball State to finish his degree.

When "Spirit" does play a strictly musical show the theme they center on is exactly what their name implies.

"I want people to receive something from us — a positive feeling — when they see us. There is spirit in whatever we do. Not necessarily the spirit of God but a good spirit," James Williams said.

The group's main focus or message is on an interracial community that James Williams and his wife, who does the group's accounting, believe in.

"If we have a message, it's that the kingdom of heaven is pluralistic and non-racial," Carlos Williams said.

But Cindy Williams said the group isn't completely a religious one. The music and lyrics aren't all Christian sounding, she said. She described it as music from the heart.

"Spirit" performs all-original music composed by James Williams. They usually play pop and show-tune music, Carlos Williams said.

They have done jazz and country music and even some hard rock. When people need a group to play at a function, they call James Williams and he'll put together the kind of group needed from the 20 members he can contact, he said.

James Williams traveled for 15 years with various bands and musical groups before he formed "Spirit." He's been on albums as a background vocal for established performers such as Tina Turner, Earth, Wind and Fire, and Chaka Khan.

When James Williams was with a group called "Black Lightning," it made an album under the same

name with MCA records.

He is awaiting word from Burt Strydom's agent, Quincy Jones, on two songs that he sent to her for recording.

"I've never really studied her music or anything. I don't know who wrote the songs for her, I just know they were for her. So we called Columbia Records and they said, 'send the songs in, but don't come on anyone listening to them,'" said.

Then the Williams' heard Strydom said wanted to use the songs on his next album, but her agent had made the final decision.

James Williams said he can't stay away from writing music and plans to spend more time on that.

Music isn't the only thing James Williams has written. He has two plays and is working on another. One of the one-act shows is performed by a theater group, Notre Dame recently.

James Williams also teaches class of performing arts at Muncie YMCA. He's thinking about getting another group together to represent the people of the YMCA for the same reason he formed "Spirit," wants to give others an opportunity to perform, he said.

In addition to this, senior C. Weyens will make a video of "Spirit" which will feature Cindy Williams. James Williams said wanted to feature her before she leaves.

James Williams has already had much success in the world of performing arts and now, through "Spirit," he's concentrating on giving others a chance to succeed.

Bug bill exterminated in South Carolina

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — With a spray of rhetoric, the House of Representatives exterminated a bill that would have made the praying mantis South Carolina's official insect.

There was little alternative

when Rep. Woody Aydtette strode to the podium with his tongue firmly in cheek and suggested a down-home alternative: the cockroach.

Aydtette noted that the state already had plenty of symbols.

"This thing's been around South Carolina for 50 or 60 billion years and hasn't changed."

The House decided to drop the subject of state symbols altogether.

Today is "DOLLAR DAY!"
 All Seats, All Shows, \$1.00
 At 2:00-3:50-5:40-7:35-9:25 p.m.

The Perfect Man...

Casual Sex?

R



[Print this item:](#) Page 25

The Muncie Times, May 2

Actress Cynda Williams in Brief visit to Muncie

By Tabatha A. Tower-Harris



Hollywood actress Cynda Williams, formally known as "Cindy Williams," paid a visit to her second hometown of Muncie, Indiana.

Originally from Chicago, Ill., Williams moved to Muncie during her senior year in high school, later graduating from Northside High School. She also graduated from Ball State University with degree in theater.

Living in Chicago was fun and dangerous. The neighborhood that she lived in was all right, until a gang called the Disciples moved in and took over.

Her father felt that it had become too dangerous to live in Chicago. He moved his family to Muncie.

Williams was no stranger to Muncie. Before moving here because she'd visit her grandfather, the Rev. J.C. Williams, during the summer. Williams did consider her move to Muncie to be "Culture Shock." Moving from city life to town life, as well as moving from surroundings of more black people to surroundings of more white people, was culture shock for her.

She said that while in Chicago, the only white person she really knew was her mother.

As a child, growing up was difficult for Williams because black children called her 'honkey' and said that she thought that she was better than they were. While the white children called her 'nigger.'

Although she went through racial challenges, she said that her family was great. Though she admits that her Euro-American side of the family was least accepting than her African-American side of the family.

"My father raised me to be black...if someone asked me what I was, I'd say black. I think it depends on your parenting. I've been to Ireland...I haven't been to Africa, but I plan to go," said Williams.

Her proud parents, Charles Kenneth and Beverly Williams named her Cindy Ann Williams. They also have three other daughters, Monica, Sodiqa and Meagan, as well as two sons, Charles Haasan and Fredrick.

To be an actress, Williams had to join the Screen Actress Guild (SAG). To be a part of that union, no two actresses could have the same name, to prevent a mix-up in fan mail. Hollywood already had a Cindy Williams, formerly of the

Note to readers:

We apologize for the missing jump page of this story in the last issue of The Muncie Times. This is the story in its entirety.

hit television sit-com "Laverne and Shirley." Therefore, Williams had to change her name to "Cynda."

Williams had been acting and singing her whole life through her family and the church.

She was in town briefly to sing at the United Methodist Church "Great Event" in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Williams said that her influences have been her uncle, James Wesley Williams, also an actor; her grandfather the Rev. J.C. Williams Sr., and two teachers, Nancy Crouse and Beth Turcotte.

Singing and acting had been her dream. While attending Ball State, Williams worked in a summer theatre program.

After graduation she moved to Connecticut with a friend and they later decided to take their chances on a move to New York.

They worked to save enough money while in Connecticut to support them for a month in the "Big Apple." After the month had come and gone and Williams has no real breaks in the business, she had to take a job as a hostess at a restaurant.

She answered the phones and then started doing some accounting. She was later doing accounting for four restaurants. A few months later came her big break with a Spike Lee film.

Her first movie was "Mo' Better Blues" with Spike Lee when she moved to New York in 1988. "It was cool because I got to work with some veteran actors, Denzel Washington, Wesley Snipes and Spike Lee. I got to work with people that knew what they were doing," said Williams.

Williams felt that her landing a part in "Mo' Better Blues" 4 to 5 months after moving to New York had a lot to do with her faith in God.

"It has a spiritual thing going on. I pretty much know what I wanted to do and I have a very strong relationship with my God. But when I moved to New York, I was expecting to do well," said Williams.

Williams later relocated from New York to Los Angeles because one of the movies that she was auditioning for, "One False Move," was casting only out of Los Angeles. Williams feels that it is very important to maintain her Christian beliefs and never compromise her standards for the Hollywood lifestyle. She feels that choosing proper friends, who will complement her lifestyle, is the lonely but the better road to take.

"It's very important to have a strong foundation with your family and to be careful about picking your friends. It's difficult not being part of the Hollywood scene and work in Hollywood. It's a very long, hard and lonely road. I've had some difficult times but God has always provided for me," said Williams.

Williams lives in North Hollywood. "I never intended to be a movie actress because I didn't have the experience. I planned to be a theatre actress on Broadway. I didn't expect to live in Los Angeles," said Williams.

Williams likes living in North Hollywood because it's a multicultural residential area. The only bad thing about living in Los Angeles is that she misses her family.

1998 P Prograr accepti applicat

The House Office of Community Development accepting applications for the 1998 Paint the Program exterior paint to eligible homes within the City whose homes visible need for

The 1998 Paint the Program \$10,000 and up projects for completion this year. Applicants will be reviewed to determine the homeowner's complete willingness to proper paint procedures. Homeowners in applying for should call Steve or Kay Piner for more information on how to apply for the program.

Volunte needed TEAM Showca

Community volunteers are help at the Showcase '98, County's 100th anniversary celebration. The festival schedule Saturday, May 2nd at the Delaware Fairgrounds. Shifts between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. are assigned to an older individual helping with directing, assisting with other activities. Call 747-71 Friday if interested.

<http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/printview/collection/MunTimes/id/6987/type/compoundobject/show/6971>

<http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/MunTimes/id/6987/rec/1>

BIOS

MC NEARY from page 7

He also investigated numerous discriminatory complaints in Delaware County.

He served on the Muncie Housing Authority for two terms. During that time, the Munsyana Homes became a more integrated and diverse place for all residents to live. He has served on several boards and committees: Tax Abatement, Martin Luther King Day Planning Committee, Muncie Human Rights Commission, Study Circles for Racial Harmony, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, YMCA, East Central Private Industry Council, Inc.



Fredrick W. Wenger

Fredrick Wenger was born in Sturgis, Mich. He received his undergraduate education at Olivet Nazarene University and his law degree from Indiana University in 1969. Following graduation from law school, Mr. Wenger served in the Indiana attorney general's office, before entering private practice in Muncie.

Mr. Wenger was a member

of the Muncie Bar Association, the Indiana and American Bar Associations and was admitted to practice in the U.S. District Courts for the northern and southern districts of Indiana. In the past Mr. Wenger was town attorney for the towns of Albany and Selma. Mr. Wenger was active in church activities and he served on the board of directors of the YMCA, the Delaware County Cancer Society and the Muncie Delaware County Area Senior Citizens Council.

Mr. Wenger served in the Indiana General Assembly. In his first term, Mr. Wenger was elected "Outstanding Freshman Republican Legislator" by the members of the Indiana House of Representatives.

He supported MOM and helped many people through his law practice.



Stefan S. Anderson

Stefan S. Anderson, chairman of First Merchants Corporation and First Merchants Bank, has been a proud supporter of Martin Luther King Day since its

inception as a community-wide event. In 1988, First Merchants Bank hosted the first Martin Luther King Day community breakfast, and a year later initiated holiday observance of MLK Day by financial institutions. Anderson is past president of the Community Foundation, immediate past chairman of the Community Alliance to Promote Education and serves as chairman of the board of trustees of the Minnetrista Cultural Center. He is also an active member of the Community Committee on Racism, sponsored by TEAMwork for Quality Living, of which he serves as a director.



Cynda Williams

Cynda Williams is a Ball State University graduate, the daughter of Charles and Beatrice Williams and granddaughter of the Rev. J.C. Williams, former pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church.

An actress and singer in her own right ("Mo' Better Blues" and "One False Move" are among her movie titles, as well as made-for-TV movies), her newest role is that of mommy to a

bouncing baby boy.



Doris Faulkner Stewart Retired

Muncie music teacher Doris Faulkner Stewart is known for her warm smile and personality.

For many years she was the director for the annual community Christmas sing and was minister of Muncie at Bethel Church.

Stewart, along with her first husband Edgar Faulkner, owned and operated Faulkner's Mortuary, the now oldest mortuary in Muncie. Which is now operated by her son, Edgar Jr., Faulkner's Mortuary.

Stewart is a much loved and respected educator, musician, businesswoman, mother and grandmother.



Muriel J. Weeden

Muriel J. Weeden is a counselor at Muncie Central High School. She is a woman of integrity, stamina and determination. Weeden, a past president of Muncie Black Expo (1995 to 1996) is also an ordained minister. Weeden, a part of the ministerial staff of Union Missionary Baptist Church, Weeden has been "mother of love" exhorting women to be what God wants them to be.



James Vanleer

James Vanleer is a former Labor Relations manager and a former Indiana assemblyman. Vanleer is a trustee and deacon at Calvary Baptist Church. He is also president of the board of directors of Delaware County Minority Health Coalition.

Vanleer was instrumental in establishing the Muncie Commission on the Social Status of Black Males.

He is a devoted husband, father and grandfather.

BIOS cont. on page 24



72 HOURS

Win free tickets to Q.A.R. by visiting 72hrsonline.com. Learn more about the show on PAGE 5.

DNNEWS

See what is going on around the world.

COLUMBUS, OHIO

Medicaid hotline refers users to phone sex number

(AP) — The voicemail system on Ohio's toll-free Medicaid line has been referring callers to a service not covered by Medicaid: a phone sex business.

The problem stemmed from a typo in the voicemail script and was corrected Tuesday, said Dan Allen, a spokesman for the state Department of Job and Family Services. The incorrect number had been in the system since Oct. 4.

The mistake went unnoticed until Dan Phillips of Jamestown complained that he called the number provided by the voicemail system.

"I thought it's pretty poor that you're calling to find out something about your livelihood and you get that," Phillips said.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

91-year-old man earns law degree in land down under

(AP) — A 91-year-old man has earned a law degree from an Australian university, finishing the six-year course more than a year ahead of schedule because he said "time is of the essence."

Allan Stewart was granted a Bachelor of Laws from the University of New England in eastern Australia on Saturday. Course study normally spans six years, but Stewart finished in just 4 1/2 years.

"There is a saying in law that time is of the essence," he said in a statement issued by the university. "I think if I had let it run too much longer I might not have finished it."

CINCINNATI

Girl wins chance to set free 8-pound grocery lobster

(AP) — A 7-year-old girl who wanted to set free a grocery store lobster has gotten her wish.

Myranda Hutchinson won the nearly 8-pound lobster last month during an anniversary celebration at a Big's grocery store in Cincinnati.

"I nicknamed him Bubba because he was so big," said Dave Brandon, the store's seafood salesman.

After winning Bubba, Myranda's family called and e-mailed zoes and aquariums, but none wanted to take in the crustacean.

"That size is unusual, but lobsters are a dime a dozen," Columbus Zoo and Aquarium curator Mike Brittain said.

DNNOTES

THEATER



CYNDA WILLIAMS sits patiently while Allison Hamilton applies her makeup in preparation for the Oct. 8 performance of "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" at University Theater.

a leading lady's inner strength

Alumna Cynda Williams reflects on her road to success

Kwame Stiffler Mizah ■ Staff Reporter

In "Mo' Better Blues," Cynda Williams sang the pants off of Denzel Washington. She has twice played Halle Berry's older sister in the movies "The Wedding" and "Introducing Dorothy Dandridge." She then got "Caught Up" with Bokeem Woodbine as his thieving, psychic companion.

Invited to Ball State University as a professional guest artist for "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992," the creamy-caramel skinned actress with short, curly hair reflected on her experience as a leading lady of film, television and stage. But the most important experience she shared was the pain it took to make the gains as a star of the silver screen.

Mo' Better "Blues"

"It ain't no joke out there," — Williams

Following her college graduation from Ball State in 1988, the then 22-year-old hopeful set sail for Manhattan to try finding work. Diverted to Connecticut at first, Williams had to work two full-time jobs to make ends meet. Soon after, she and a roommate found a place in New York City and Williams was cast in an off-Broadway musical titled "Two by Two," a play about Noah's Ark with music by Richard Rogers.

"It was exactly how it sounded," she said. "It



CYNDA WILLIAMS, along with the "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" cast, does a vocal exercise just minutes before the show.

was cute."

Later that year she got her big break as aspiring jazz singer Charlie Betancourt in "Mo' Better Blues." And Williams got the "blues" when she found out what the professional world of acting was really like. After Spike Lee gave her the call to come back to the studio to tell her she got the leading role, she was greeted at the studio door by Denzel Washington, who told her he had good news and bad news. The good news was she got the part, and the bad news was her feet were too big, even though she wears a size six.

Williams also had to endure mistreatment from several people working on the project.

Please see ACTRESS, page 6

NATION

Pitcher dies after NYC plane crash

Yankee flew into skyscraper, unnamed passenger also dead

Colleen Long ■ Associated Press

NEW YORK — A small plane carrying New York Yankee Cory Lidle slammed into a 50-story apartment building Wednesday after issuing a distress call, killing the pitcher and a second person in a crash that rained flaming debris onto the sidewalks and briefly raised fears of another terrorist attack.

A law enforcement official in Washington said Lidle — an avid pilot who got his license during last year's off-season — was aboard the single-engine aircraft when it plowed into the 30th and 31st floors of the condominium high-rise on Manhattan's Upper East Side. Mayor Michael Bloomberg said both people aboard were killed.

Lidle's passport was found on the street, according to a federal official, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. It was not immediately clear who was at the controls and who was the second person aboard. There was no official confirmation of Lidle's death from city officials.

Federal Aviation Administration records showed the plane was registered to Lidle, who had repeatedly assured reporters in recent weeks that flying was safe and that the Yankees — who were traumatized in 1979 when catcher Thurman Munson was killed in the crash of a plane he was piloting — had no reason to worry.

"The flying" the 34-year-old Lidle, who had a home near Los Angeles, told The Philadelphia Inquirer this summer. "I'm not worried about it. I'm safe up there. I feel very comfortable with my abilities flying an airplane."

"No matter what's going on in your life, when you get up in that plane, everything's gone," Lidle told a Comcast SportsNet interviewer while flying his plane in April.

The crash came just four days after the Yankees' embarrassingly quick elimination from the playoffs, during which Lidle had been relegated to the bullpen. In recent days, Lidle had taken abuse from

Please see CRASH, page 6

Yankee pitcher dies in plane crash

A plane crashed into an apartment complex with more than 800 apartments at 2:29 p.m. on Wednesday killing Yankee's pitcher, Cory Lidle and his flight instructor.



CAMPUS

Crime statistics remain steady

Offenses on and around campus remained relatively constant in 2005

Gabriel Khouli ■ Chief Reporter

The annual campus crime statistics reports for Ball State University are comparable from 2004 to 2005 and nothing in the report stands out, Director of Public Safety Gene Burton said.

Have tried, director of Student Rights and Com-

Actress: Williams remembers difficulties of gaining foothold in acting community

Continued from PAGE 1

She was sexually harassed by some of the bigger-named people throughout the filming.

"They just want some pretty young thing that they can get some booty from," she said. "Pretty; definitely; young; yes; a thing from whom they can get some booty; hell no," she said.

But she held on to the values of her Christian upbringing and did not "put out," which was part of the cause of her conflicts.

She explained the majority of casting really does happen on the casting couch (meaning having sex with people who head the projects).

"I was scarred by the experience," she said. "It was traumatizing."

She also said she was forced to grow up quickly and become more astute about the business. She was paid the least amount a leading actress could have been paid at the time, which was \$1,400 a week, and a couple hundred dollars for the song she recorded on the soundtrack, titled "Harlem Blues," despite the fact it reached the top of the R&B charts.

BILLY BOB THORNTON

"I WANT TO DIE." — WILLIAMS

One person who helped her transition from a virginal, naive girl to an assertive, thick-skinned woman was her ex-husband, actor Billy Bob Thornton. Yes, the same Billy Bob who married Angelina Jolie before she was half of "Brangelina."

Williams said she was sexually abused as a child and had very little positive romantic experiences with men. Thornton was the first person with whom she had positive relations and, because of her religious values, she felt that he should be the man she married.

Unfortunately, she said, they did not have much of anything else in common and she found herself unhappy with the relationship.

"Deep beneath the garbage is a wonderful person, he really is," she said.

Also, Williams was unaware she was suffering from Grave's Disease, which is a disorder as a result of an overactive thyroid. This caused tumors, some of which were the size of apples, growing on her gland. She was burned out and had her weight fluctuated from time to time. So with the emotional pain of the relationship and the disorder, she felt like death was an alter-

Cyndra Williams' credits

The following are a few of Williams' career accomplishments:

Film

- When Do We Eat
- With or Without You
- March
- Relax ... It's Just Sex
- Caught Up
- Last Call
- Spirit Lost
- Black Rose Of Harlem

Television

- The Tie That Binds
- Condition Red
- Wet
- Ghost Brigade
- One False Move
- Mo' Better Blues
- Introducing Dorothy Dandridge
- The Wedding

native relief, she said.

But Thornton recognized her unhappiness and decided to "let her go." Williams said that she did not have the inner strength at the time to make the decision to leave him, and would have stayed in the relationship had he not suggested the divorce.

WHEN DO WE EAT

"WE GET WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN." — WILLIAMS

Having many bad experiences in her professional career, Williams was easily able to appreciate the times when she worked with nice, professional, talented people. Director Darin Scott was one of the few directors who made her feel comfortable on the set. According to Williams, he was well organized, creative and completely respectful to her.

To top it off he had Craft Services, a catering company used for the filming of projects, provide food for the actors.

"Food is such an important part of the process," she said.

She explained she had been on sets where they were filming hours upon hours, and all the production really offered was M&Ms and other junk foods. Actors really need to be well-nourished during intense shoots.

"It keeps the set moving," she said.

Some other projects she enjoyed working on were the "Talented Tenth," a play based on W.E.B. Dubois' ideology; "When Do We Eat," a movie directed by Salvador Litvak and "Caught Up," which co-starred Bokeem Woodbine.

Working with Halle Berry was also a treat.

"She is a sweet girl," she said. "I really feel like she is my younger sister."

She did say that Berry has way more potential than she puts out there and she wishes she would pull from her pain to really get into the psyches of certain characters.

TWILIGHT: CYNDRA WILLIAMS, 2006

"I CAN CHANGE FOR YOU,"

— WILLIAMS

Williams has used her grief to bring many of her characters to life. She explained when one does not have time to prepare for roles, sometimes that is all one can really do. In "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" Williams played the title character of Twilight Bay, an ex-gang leader who was an essential part of squashing gang violence. The purpose of the character was to bring hope to a tumultuous experience. The show paralleled Williams' life because she had been through many "tests" while in a career that most people view as a fairy-tale. She recently talked to high school students about her trials.

"I saw so much hope in their eyes," she said. "I want people to realize that if they persist in the battle of life, they can survive."

Williams has brought hope to her fellow cast members including junior musical theater and dance major, Chadade' McAlister.

"It's been really inspiring," McAlister said. "She being the only person of color [for part of the time she was a student at Ball State] really had to push her way through ... She really makes me feel capable."

According to Twilight Bay, Williams' character, twilight is a place between darkness and light, a place that he likes to call "Limbo." In Roman Catholic theology, "Limbo" is the temporary status of righteous souls who died but did not go to heaven yet. Perhaps that is where Williams is, looking toward the light but still trying to overcome the darkness that had cast shadows over much of her life.

Williams drew a parallel between Rodney King and her life. It is up to the individuals to make changes for the better.

"Life can beat your ass," she said. "But I take responsibility. I claim 'victor-hood.' I don't want to be a victim."



CYNDRA WILLIAMS performs in the spotlight Sept. 25, during a dress rehearsal for "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992" at University Theater.

Marquice Gee
Monday, May 1, 2017 1, 2017
HONR 390 Oral History Workshop: Ball State University
African-American Alumni Oral History Project
Dr. Michael Doyle

Questions for Oral History Interview with Muriel Weeden on
4 April 2017,
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

NOTES

Uncle had
barbershop
1st A.D. teacher
@BSU 29
Helping
others
student teach report
in Smedtown
(prejudice)
card
pic of grad
3rd crowd

- Hello, my name is MG, today is Tues. April 4, 2017, I am interviewing Muriel Wenden on Ball State's campus as part of the BSU Afr. Amer. Alumni Oral History Project. Hello Ms. Wenden.
- What were your parent's names? How many siblings?
- What was it like to grow up w/ that many people in house?
- What were your parents like growing up? What values did they try to instill in you growing up?
- What memories do you have of growing up in Mound City, IL?
- Why did you move to Muncie? Initial reactions
- From your youth do you have any memories of stereotypes against African Americans in popular culture?
- From attending Muncie Central High, what was your academic/social life like?
- Emmett Till was born today's after you on July 25, 1941 also in the state of Illinois. Were you personally affected by his death?
- After high school, you received a Jr. Secretarial Cert. from IN Business College. What exactly is that & why did you choose this?
- Why did you take a 10 yr. hiatus before attending BSU for your Bachelor's?
- Degree & why?
- Social life & educational life? Racism?
- Deciding to go to Grad School
- Minority Student Union
- BSU: "An Inter. Hist." 1986 BSA Pres. David Coates activist. Any relation?
- During undergrad work @ Muncie Star Press in classified advertising. What was the position? Why & experience?

During grad school you were a Grad. Ass. what did you do in this position?

You have 3 children, what was/is it like being a mom? What values did you try to instill in them?

How did you try to prepare your children for possible racism they could face? Did they face any?

What role has religion played in your life?

What role does community play in your life?

What changes/similarities do you see in the Afr. Amer. community from when you were growing up to now?

How do you try to uplift & encourage youth in the Muncie community?

Are you a member of the BSU Black Alumni Constituent Society? How did you become involved? What importance does it have in your life?

What jobs/positions have you held in your career?

Before we close the interview, is there anything I haven't asked about that you would like people to know about your life, career, or experiences at BSU or afterward?

On behalf of the BSU Afr. Amer. Alumni Oral History Project, I'd like to thank you for your participation!

Pre-Interview Notes
Conducted by Frank Lacopo
On 3/20/17

Initial Telephone contact with Muriel Weeden

-Muriel encountered protracted troubles with racism while a graduate student at Ball State. In particular, she had to work under a professor in a research methods class for her field who was "not particularly encouraging to people of color." This was a particularly bad class, as a white female student often also chimed in at times when this professor evidenced his racism to the whole class.

-Her research methods professor often expressed his view that she "did not belong" and that she was in the counseling program only to satisfy quotas.

-She was thwarted in her effort to avoid this racist professor. She attempted to drop the research methods class and re-take it over the summer, but the class was not able to make and she had to re-register for the class with the same professor again the next year.

-She eventually needed to approach other professors in the department for help, as the racist one would not approve any of her research proposals, though the consensus in her department was that her proposals were very good.

-Somehow this professor ended up on a campus-wide committee for introducing more diversity in the classroom. This is still a bewildering reality to Muriel.

-She decided to write a letter to the president of the university and head of her department about her experiences after she received her graduate degree. This was her way of making the experience of future African American students easier.

-As a holder of a Ball State undergraduate degree, she worked in Wisconsin for twelve years. She then moved back to Muncie to get her graduate degree. Then she gained employment with Muncie High School (did not specify which one). She is now retired.

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BIOS

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He also investigated numerous discriminatory complaints in Delaware County.

He served on the Muncie Housing Authority for two terms. During that time, the Munsyana Homes became a more integrated and diverse place for all residents to live. He has served on several boards and committees: Tax Abatement, Martin Luther King Day Planning Committee, Muncie Human Rights Commission, Study Circles for Racial Harmony, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, YMCA, East Central Private Industry Council, Inc.



Fredrick W. Wenger

Fredrick Wenger was born in Sturgis, Mich. He received his undergraduate education at Olivet Nazarene University and his law degree from Indiana University in 1969. Following graduation from law school, Mr. Wenger served in the Indiana attorney general's office, before entering private practice in Muncie.

Mr. Wenger was a member

of the Muncie Bar Association, the Indiana and American Bar Associations and was admitted to practice in the U.S. District Courts for the northern and southern districts of Indiana. In the past Mr. Wenger was town attorney for the towns of Albany and Selma. Mr. Wenger was active in church activities and he served on the board of directors of the YMCA, the Delaware County Cancer Society and the Muncie Delaware County Area Senior Citizens Council.

Mr. Wenger served in the Indiana General Assembly. In his first term, Mr. Wenger was elected "Outstanding Freshman Republican Legislator" by the members of the Indiana House of Representatives.

He supported MOM and helped many people through his law practice.



Stefan S. Anderson

Stefan S. Anderson, chairman of First Merchants Corporation and First Merchants Bank, has been a proud supporter of Martin Luther King Day since its

inception as a community-wide event. In 1988, First Merchants Bank hosted the first Martin Luther King Day community breakfast, and a year later initiated holiday observance of MLK Day by financial institutions. Anderson is past president of the Community Foundation, immediate past chairman of the Community Alliance to Promote Education and serves as chairman of the board of trustees of the Minnetrista Cultural Center. He is also an active member of the Community Committee on Racism, sponsored by TEAMwork for Quality Living, of which he serves as a director.



Cynda Williams

Cynda Williams is a Ball State University graduate, the daughter of Charles and Beatrice Williams and granddaughter of the Rev. J.C. Williams, former pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church.

An actress and singer in her own right ("Mo' Better Blues" and "One False Move" are among her movie titles, as well as made-for-TV movies), her newest role is that of mommy to a

bouncing baby boy.



Doris Faulkner Stewart Retired

Muncie music teacher Doris Faulkner Stewart is known for her warm smile and personality.

For many years she was the director for the annual community Christmas sing and was minister of Muncie at Bethel Church.

Stewart, along with her first husband Edgar Faulkner, owned and operated Faulkner's Mortuary, the now oldest mortuary in Muncie. Which is now operated by her son, Edgar Jr., Faulkner's Mortuary.

Stewart is a much loved and respected educator, musician, businesswoman, mother and grandmother.



Muriel J. Weeden

Muriel J. Weeden is a counselor at Muncie Central High School. She is a woman of integrity, stamina and determination. Weeden, a past president of Muncie Black Expo (1995 to 1996) is also an ordained minister. Weeden, a part of the ministerial staff of Union Missionary Baptist Church, Weeden has been "mother of love" exhorting women to be what God wants them to be.



James Vanleer

James Vanleer is a former Labor Relations manager and a former Indiana assemblyman. Vanleer is a trustee and deacon at Calvary Baptist Church. He is also president of the board of directors of Delaware County Minority Health Coalition.

Vanleer was instrumental in establishing the Muncie Commission on the Social Status of Black Males.

He is a devoted husband, father and grandfather.

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Robert S. Curtis

Robert Curtis is President and CEO of Cardinal Health System. Cardinal Health System is the parent company of Ball Memorial Hospital, a 400 bed teaching hospital, a home health company, a physician practice and Rehabilitation Corporation, and a managed care venture. Curtis came to Cardinal from Clara Mass Health System in Belleville, NJ where he served as President and CEO for 15 years. Previously, he was Vice President of North Carolina Baptist hospitals in Winston, Salem for five years. Curtis holds a Doctorate in Health Administration from the Medical University of South Carolina and a Masters in Hospital Administration from Washington University in St. Louis. He has taught at the Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at NYU and is a Fellow in the American College of Health Care Executives. Dr. Curtis has also taught Health Services management at Ball State University. Dr. Curtis serves on numerous health care policy committees at both the state and national level and is active in local civic organizations.



Michael R. Gorin

Michael R. Gorin is the associate principal at Muncie Southside High School. He is a native of Muncie, Indiana, graduating from Southside high school in 1964. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in 1969. He received his Master's of Art degree in 1975 from school of Journalism and another Master's in Secondary School Administration in 1983. He has been employed by the Muncie Community School Corporation for 35 years. During this time period he taught for 15 years the subject of government, World Affairs, and U.S. History. He has been a secondary school administrator for the last 20 years.

Michael is married to Camice Gorin, and they have two children. Their daughter Shayla, lives in Indianapolis and works for the Eli Lilly Corporation. Their son Bradon Gorin is a 2000 graduate of Purdue School of Engineering. He is starting his 4th year in N.F.L., playing the last two years with "Super Bowl" champions New England Patriots football team.



Eld. Muriel J. Coatie Weeden

Weeden was born in Mound City, IL, and moved to Muncie at an early age. She attended Muncie Schools and graduated from Muncie Central High School. She earned a B.S. degree in Elementary Education and a M.A. in Counseling Psychology from Ball State University. At Muncie Central High School Muriel has been a counselor for 15 years and head of the Guidance Department for the last 5 years. She is a past president of Muncie Black Expo; a member of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Dream Team; founder/director of Women God Can Use Ministry; Associate Minister of Union Missionary Baptist Church; director of singles Ministry at Union; Co-Director of Family Ministry; member of Missionary Choir; Christian Education Planning Committee; and the Intercessory Prayer Ministry. Weeden is an advocate for youth and those who are unable to help themselves. She truly believes "We can do all things through Christ."



Dr. Scott R. Popplewell

Dr. Scott R. Popplewell, a native of Muncie, and earned his B.S. degree in Elementary Education from Ball State University, His M.A.E. in Reading Education from Indiana University, and his Ed. D. in Reading Education from Ball State University. Prior to his employment at Ball State University, Scott was a classroom teacher and a national literacy consultant for a major publisher and served as a literacy consultant for the Saudi ARAMCO schools while he resided in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Since his return to Muncie, Scott served on the Board of Directors of Motivate Our Minds (MOMs) as a board member for three years and then served as the MOMs Board President for three terms. He recently ended a two-year term on the Indiana Adult Literacy Coalition, an appointment he received from the late Governor Frank O'Bannon. Currently, he is Executive Director for the Indiana State Reading Association and serves on the Governmental Affairs Committee for the International Reading. In addition to his responsibilities at Ball State, he relishes opportunities to consult with schools where the majority of children at risk for reading failure. Scott is currently Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at Ball State University and was awarded the Outstanding Teaching Award for Teachers College in April 2004.



Sandra D. Leek

Attorney at Law, has served as director of the Indiana Civil Rights Commission since November 1992. Following four (4) years of leadership at the agency Governor Frank O'Bannon reappointed Ms. Leek in January 1996. Prior to heading the Indiana Civil Rights Commission, Ms. Leek served as chairperson of the Indiana Unemployment Insurance Review Board, a position she held from May 1991 through October 1992. Before service in state government, Ms. Leek worked in several capacities with the Legal Services Organization of Indiana, Inc. Ms. Leek has practiced civil law in both federal and state courts, concentrating on government entitlement programs, housing law, community economic development, and family law. Ms. Leek has written several articles on Indiana civil rights laws and on the pro bono delivery of legal assistance to indigents. She was the executive editor on the 1985, 1992, and the 1993 editions of You and The Law, a layman's guide to Indiana and federal laws and regulations for more than 30 civil law topics. Currently, Ms. Leek serves as director of Indiana Legal Services, a commissioner for the Commission on the Social Status of Black Males, and a member on the Indianapolis - Private Industry Council.

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Memories of My Family Q&A With Elder Muriel Weeden

Q: Who are the members of your immediate or extended family living in Muncie? Where did you all come from, or where most of you all born here?

A: My parents had a total of nine children; seven of them are yet living. Elder Charles E. Coatie moved to Muncie after serving in the military in Korea. He is the pastor of the New Mt. Calvary Church of God in Christ. He is the father of four daughters; Shenita Gail (Earl) Venable, Sheila Ann Coatie, Charlotte Johnson and BethAnn Coatie. Pastor Coatie has 5 grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. He was married to the late Saint Ann Dennis Coatie.

George Wallace Coatie and Elder Muriel Weeden were both born in Mound City, Illinois as were all of the Coatie children. We moved to Muncie in 1945 with Mrs. Lena Rogers, our paternal aunt. Her husband, Herbert operated a barber shop in the 1300 block of First Street. She brought the two of us along with my sisters, Bertha Louise, Barbara Ann and Naomi Ruth to Muncie in 1945. My parents, Bishop Dixon and Mother Georgia Coatie followed with my brother Robert Mason Coatie shortly afterwards.

Charles completed high school in Mound City, Illinois. The rest of the Coatie Children, including our brother Elmer Gene

attended Muncie Central High School.

George and his wife Darlene are parents of Mark Donnell Coatie, Angela Allen and Tamiko Lynn Coatie, grandparents of nine and great-grandparents of four. Elder Muriel Weeden is the mother of Diane Elaine Stevens of Kentucky, Ernest Ricardo Weeden and Mrs. Shelli (Marwin) Strong of Muncie. She is grandmother of six and great-grandmother of six.

Q: Who is or was the "matriarch" or "patriarch" that everyone in the family respected?

A: Georgia Mason Coatie was the matriarch of our family and Bishop Dixon Coatie was the patriarch. My father's first

mother Hazel because that's what they heard other people call her. My oldest sister Bertha thought her mom had died because they didn't call her "mama." Bertha promised God if He would give them another mother she would call her "mama" and that's what they did. Holidays and birthdays were always a big deal in our family and as long as our parents lived everyone came home for family gatherings.

Q: Are there any memorable stories that have been passed down from generation to generation?

A: My parents were pioneers in the Church of God in Christ. My dad traveled and preached out



Bob Coatie and Muriel Weeden at her graduation from Ball State University in August 1974

tion. Once he was conducting a revival in another town and had to cross the river which was in flood stage. A group of men were walking across and everyone except my dad had on hip boots. Bishop Coatie only had knee boots. When the group of men reached the other side, they all took off their boots and began pouring water out of their boots. My dad took off his knee boots and turned them upside-down and not one drop of water was in them and his feet were completely dry!

Q: Who are the grandkids and what are your hopes for them?

A: There are so many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. My hopes for them are that they would some day live out the legacy that was established my Bishop and Mother Coatie. My parents believed in family, God and their fellow man. My dad never met a stranger, but treated

everyone like family. Bishop and Mother Coatie were truly committed to the work of building the kingdom of God and trying to help others along the way. My mom was a licensed evangelist and my dad was the pastor of the New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ for 44 years. Four children, Charles, Bertha, Muriel and Robert have followed them in the ministry. Also, granddaughters Rebecca Rodgers-Clayton, Cathy Rodgers-Carther and Shelli Harpole-Strong. Many other relatives are also ministers.

Q: What hopes and dreams do you have for Muncie's minority communities today?

A: My hope and dream for the minority community of Muncie is that they will awaken to the possibilities and potential for greatness that lies within

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Bishop Dixon and Mother Georgia Coatie

wife, Hazel Henry died and he was left with five small children. The older children had called their

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each of them and start moving towards creating a better society. We can change situations and conditions. I would also hope to see minorities develop real relationships with God and know Him as the true source of all they are lacking in their lives.

Q: When you pass away, how do you want your family to remember you?

A: When I am no longer here, I would like to be remembered as one who tried to make a difference in the lives of anyone and everyone with whom I



Bishop Coatie at Washington Carver for grandparents day. Granddaughter Shelli (L) and friend Tenisha Love (R)

came in contact. I want to be known as someone who fought for the underdog and helped whenever and wherever I could. Most of all, I want my

Lord and Savior to be pleased with the life I lived. If that happens, I know my life will be a testimony to my parents.



Pastor Charles E. Coatie

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Digital Supplements

Cynda Williams Interview: <https://dmr.bsu.edu/digital/collection/BSUAAAlmOrH/id/41/rec/42>

Muriel Weeden Interview: <https://dmr.bsu.edu/digital/collection/BSUAAAlmOrH/id/36/rec/37>

Student Composed Video: <https://dmr.bsu.edu/digital/collection/BSUAAAlmOrH/id/42/rec/35>